Table of Contents

1. Prologue
2. Chapter One
3. Chapter Two
4. Chapter Three
5. Chapter Four
6. Chapter Five
7. Chapter Six
8. *Chapter Seven
9. Chapter Eight
10. Chapter Nine
11. Chapter Ten
12. Chapter Eleven
13. Chapter Twelve
14. Chapter Thirteen
15. Chapter Fourteen
16. Chapter Fifteen
17. Chapter Sixteen
18. Chapter Seventeen
19. Chapter Eighteen
20. Chapter Nineteen
21. Chapter Twenty (FINAL)

Prologue

A young, mottled she-cat was curled up in the nursery, watching her kits as they suckled. There was a particular one that she liked - Maplekit. This kit had a beautiful coat - she was a white tortoise-shell with dark brown, almost black, and ginger patches. Her green eyes had a gleam in them that she enjoyed.
The cat looked up as another entered the nursery - a tom called Newtheart. He padded over to the she-cat with a scowl.

When the queen did not say anything, the tom growled. "Well, what are their names?" He glowered.

The she-cat jumped a bit. "Oh, right, yes." She mewed. "This one is Pinekit - " she flicked her tail over a brown tabby tom with a white chest, underbelly, and legs. "This one is Sunkit - " she did the same thing over a white 'n ginger she-cat. "And this one is Maplekit, in honor of MapleClan - " she mewed, flicking her tail over that kit.

"It is a shame that you only have one tom." He picked the tom kit up in his jaws.

"Don't." The queen said stiffly. "He needs to suckle." she meowed. The tom grunted, dropping the kit down next to her.

"Fine then. Though why did you name Maplekit ... well, Maplekit, Cherryflower?" He asked.

"In honor of MapleClan, like I said." The queen - Cherryflower - responded.

"That's the thing! She is a she-cat, so she herself is no honor to MapleClan. Sunkit's name is fine, I suppose, however, and, surprisingly, Pinekit suits the tom. But I would suggest changing Maplekit's name. I'd say to Lostkit." He said, then turned, walking out of the nursery.

Before Cherryflower had been given any time to protest, she

watched her mate walk out of the crowded nursery. She sighed softly, laying her tail flat over each of her three little kits.

Chapter One

Lostkit trotted around camp with her tail held rather high in the air. The warriors glared at her in disgust, and so did a few of the apprentice, but most of them ignored her and carried on with their duties. As of now, Lostkit was five moons old. "I can't wait to become an apprentice!" She mewed. One of the warriors snorted, but Lostkit stopped him. He sat down, watching the she-kit with a cross look in his face.

"What's it like being a warrior?" She mewed.

"Well, you get to hunt, fight, and patrol. Very fun. Too bad you'll never get to do any of them." The warrior smirked.

"But Whiteclaw! Why not? I'm close to six moons now!" She pointed out.

"She-cats like yourself are worthless 'cept for makin' kitties. Keep that in mind - you're going to become a she-cat apprentice and will stay with that rank until you have produced your own litter of kits. Then you will move onto the she-cat rank - which is actually the highest rank a she-cat can climb to unless she is infertile, which rarely
happens, and in that strange coincidence, she will be forced to become a medicine cat." He said.

"Oh, well ... do they get to hunt, fight, or patrol like you all do?" Lostkit meowed.

"Not even close. They get to watch their kittens but that is the only 'patrolling' they do. Watching over them. They do not even get to learn how to hunt or fight so that they won't be able to escape the camp. That's right - they cannot even leave camp. Most she-cats have never seen the outside of the camp. But I have - and trust me, it's amazing. But you'll never get to see it." Whiteclaw grinned before turning and sashaying off. Lostkit sighed, standing there for a minute, before her mother appeared and grabbed her kit by the

scruff so that she won't be given anymore lectures.

"Is is true?" Lostkit asked as her mother groomed her pelt to make her look pretty.

"Is what true?" Her mother sighed, knowing what was coming. She had given birth to two other litters in her life - one of them was to Whiteclaw, as a matter of fact. At least one she-cat from each litter had ended up asking her the same question - why did they treat the she-cats this way? And she responded with the same thing everytime.

"Why do the toms act like they're all superior?" She asked.

"Because that is the way their minds work." Cherryflower answered simply.

"And why do they treat us like we are inferior?"

"Because that is the way their minds work." Cherryflower repeated.

"Why do they disrespect she-cats?" Lostkit mewed, not noticing that her mother was repeating the same answer over and over for all of her questions. She supposed that it did make a bit of sense ...

"Because that is the way their minds work." Cherryflower echoed yet again.

"But we make kits. Why do they treat us like we are worthless? Without us they would not even be alive." Lostkit pointed out, flicking her ears in contempt as she pawed the ground with her tiny paws.

"Because without a tom we would not be able to give birth in the first place." Cherryflower responded simply, finally breaking the chain of all of her repeats. She could tell that Lostkit had finally started to notice it and was getting rather annoyed by it.

"Why do the other Clans not treat us this way, then?" Lostkit sighed, shuffling her paws as she looked at the ground.

"Because those Clans are right. Those Clans are noble. MapleClan is

not." Cherryflower said. Lostkit could hear murmurs of agreement rise up from the other queens in the nursery, but ignored them.

"Why are we even given these positions in MapleClan?" Lostkit mewed.

"Because the toms do not think that we are of any special value in MapleClan." Her mother replied.

"Why does StarClan even allow this?" Lostkit said, looking up at her mother. An unfamiliar question to Cherryflower indeed. Most cats did not even mention StarClan until they became either she-cat apprentices or apprentice, whilst Lostkit was still yet a young kit.

"And that is a question I do not know the answer to."

Chapter Two

Lostkit woke up curled close to her mother's belly. The other two kits, Sunkit and Pinekit, squirmed around her as they tried to get some sleep. She was right flat in the middle of them both, so she was warm. But not tired. Not anymore.

She pulled herself up, nudging the other two kits while avoiding her mother, Cherryflower, as she did not want to wake the she-cat up. Not many queens got to rest as long as Cherryflower was doing right now - they were mostly expected to be awake and ready to serve a tom's every need, especially their mate's needs, which was why Lostkit didn't want to wake her. That, and she was grumpy when she was awoke from her sleep.

Pinekit grunted, looking up from his sheltered position cuddled up next to his mother. "What do you want, Lostkit?" He meowed impatiently with a small sigh to accompany his words. Lostkit didn't respond just yet, instead she turned over to her sister, Sunkit, and nudged her a tad bit harder than she had nudged Pinekit, knowing that she was a heavier sleeper than the both of them.

"Sunkit?" Lostkit whispered. When her sister didn't reply, Lostkit flicked her ears in contempt. She shook her sister harder than she had before in an attempt to wake her up. "Sunkit??" She said, louder this time, as she continued nudging her. Finally, she pushed her sister over, and yet she still did not wake. "Sunkit?!" She mewed. "Sunkit!" She hissed. She turned to Pinekit. "Pinekit! Why won't she wake up?!" She growled. Pinekit padded over to stand beside her, and nudged Sunkit as well. Still, she did not wake.

"Why won't she wake up?" Lostkit mewled, worried for her sister.

"Maybe we should ask Cherryflower ... " Pinekit suggested. Lostkit nodded in agreement and walked over to her mother. She nudged her in the stomach with her tiny white paws. Her mother's eyeslashes fluttered open and she turned to her kits. "What is it, dears?" She asked.

"Why won't Sunkit wake up?" Lostkit and Pinekit both asked at the same time. Cherryflower yawned.

"She's probably just sleeping." Cherryflower shrugged.

"We already tried waking her!" Pinekit mewed with a concerned tone in his voice, so unlike the tone that he had been using before when his other sister had awoken him from his slumber, Lostkit noted. She had always been aware that Sunkit was his favorite sibling and not her, but she didn't care all that much.

Cherryflower sighed again. "You know she's a heavy sleeper." She said.

"We know!" Lostkit said. "But we already tried everything to wake her up! We shook her, we nudged her, we called her name. We did, like, everything! Can't you just wake her up for us, please, Cherryflower?" She said.

Cherryflower sighed and nodded, sitting back up. "Sunkit?" She whispered to the kit. "Sunkit?" She repeated, louder this time. "Great StarClan, Sunkit!" She said. Lostkit noticed that some of the other queens and their kits were starting to stir.

Cherryflower became concerned now. She rolled Sunkit over onto her back and leaned down, putting her ears to the kit's heart. No heartbeat. No nothing ... Cherryflower let out a long, horrendous yowl, and the medicine cat rushed into the nursery.

"What is it?" Toadleap, the medicine cat, asked the queen, as he sat down next to her. He hardly acknowledged the other kits in the litter - not even Sunkit - and had his gaze flat on Lostkit.

"Sunkit! I think she-she's dead." Cherryflower murmured quietly. Toadleap had struggle hearing her, but managed to do so. He simply nodded.

"Alright. It is a shame that she had to die so soon. She would've been capable of producing such beautiful kits, just like her mother." Toadleap meowed, obviously trying to comfort the she-cat in quite distress. When he got no response, he gripped the scruff of the dead

kit into his jaws and exited the nursery.

Minnowcreek, one of the other queens, jumped up and padded over to Cherryflower so that she could comfort her. She set her tail down onto the other she-cat's back and gently rushed it down, up, down, up ... "It is fine Cherryflower. Sunkit would not have wanted a shot at this sort of life, anyway. She will be happy in StarClan." Minnowcreek soothed the queen.

Minnowcreek was the oldest she-cat in the Clan - she had went through six litters of kits, and out of those, had lost three. Most of the cats that she had given birth to were toms, one of which were Froststar, whom was the Clan leader now. The rest of the toms that she had gave birth to were generally respected in the Clan, such as Branchfrost, who was a brave warrior and one of the most well-known out of this whole Clan for his noble acts of bravery in war and battle.

"But ... she was so young. She could've gotten a shot at a good life - she could have escaped from this Clan, became a warrior in one of the others, had a nice mate ... she could've had kits of her own someday!" Cherryflower cried.

"Be quiet, now." Minnowcreek purred. "You'll wake up everyone from here to WolfClan!" She said. WolfClan was the Clan farthest away from MapleClan, on the west side of the forest while MapleClan resided upon the east side, where the woodlands were thicker than the rest. "Besides, there is no use in grieving over something that cannot be undone." Cherryflower was aware that Minnowcreek knew this from experience.

Cherryflower sniffed, brushing her tail over her remaining two kits. She straightened up. "Okay, you're right. This cannot be undone, no matter how much I want it to be. A life in MapleClan would not want to be the life that any she-cat would want to live." She sighed.

Lostkit looked at the two queens. "Cherryflower, is Sunkit going to wake up?" She mewled, her whiskers twitching. "I wanted to play with her. And so did Pinekit, I think." She said, and Pinekit nodded as he stumbled up beside his sister.

"No, Lostkit, Sunkit is not going to wake up." She meowed, her voice a lot stronger now than it had been before. "Let's just say that she is playing with other kits now ... in a place that is far, far away." Cherryflower sighed.

Lostkit stiffened. "Are you talking about StarClan? But Cherryflower, she's not dead! She's just sleeping." Lostkit meowed, confused.

"Yeah! She's just sleeping. She is tired, that's all ... right?" Pinekit meowed nervously, afraid that Sunkit might actually be dead.

Of course, Lostkit thought. *Why else would Cherryflower be so distressed? She must be ... must be ...* Lostkit's thoughts trailed off as Cherryflower responded. She also did not even want to think about what the answer might be.

"I am sorry, kits. But it is true." Cherryflower mewed.

Chapter Three

Toadleap entered the nursery once again. "Froststar announced that there will be no mourning for Sunkit. If she was a she-cat apprentice, then yes, there would be a mourning, but Froststar believes that since she is just yet a she-kit, there should be no mourning for her, as she has accomplished nothing." Toadleap was obviously reluctant to tell this to Cherryflower. He did not enjoy upsetting others.

Cherryflower's whiskers twitched as she sighed. "That is fine. Just please tell Froststar that I would like to see her before she is buried." Cherryflower responded as she looked up at Toadleap.

"I will get to that now." Toadleap answered as he padded out of the nursery. When the tom was out of sight, Lostkit looked at her mother.

"Why can't we mourn for her? She's a kit. Even if she hasn't succeeded in anything there's still cats who love her." Lostkit pointed out. Her mother nodded calmly. Though she looked calm and reserved on the outside, on the inside she was secretly fuming with anger at Froststar's decision. This was her kit, for StarClan's sake! She needed to be mourned over.

"I know, Lostkit. I do not understand why, either. Though as you know, Froststar has never been - " she was cut off by Toadleap entered the den, and so she quickly shut her mouth so that the tom would not catch her, as a she-cat, saying something that she should not have been saying. Even though three or four of the toms in the Clan, like Toadleap, were generally friendly towards she-cat's, they could not easily be trusted. Hardly any she-cats trusted them, like Cherryflower, for example.

"I have informed Froststar about your message. He has stated that you may visit Sunkit, but only you. Pinekit and Lostkit may not visit your daughter, as he is afraid that them two will mess everything up, troublesome as they are." Toadleap mewed. He had caught half

of Cherryflower's words, but ignored them and decided not to say anything about it. Lostkit's ears flicked as she heard that she and Pinekit would not be allowed to visit *their*sibling.

"Why not?!" Pinekit hissed, fur bristling. "I'd like to visit my sister, and so would Lostkit, I believe!" He hissed, practically echoing Lostkit's thoughts. Lostkit nodded meekly towards his statements.

Toadleap sighed. "I am sorry, kits, but Froststar's word is law, and we shall all have to respect him, whether we like it or not." He said. "We cannot question that tom, as we all know how he is when he is questioned against." Toadleap frowned at the memory. Three moons ago, his father had spoke up against Froststar's word during a meeting - and he had gotten punished by caring for kits in the nursery, which was a she-cat's job and considered a lowly task. When Toadleap's father had murdered one of the kits out of pure anger without reason, he was exiled ... which was understandable, but the first part was not, Toadleap knew.

Lostkit grunted in acknowledgement as she turned back to Pinekit. "Well, let's go do something." She mewed. Pinekit nodded in agreement and together they walked outside of the nursery. A few seconds later, they both noticed Cherryflower exiting the place to go visit her kit before she was buried by the elders of the Clan - Foxheart and Thornscratch.

A group made firmly of warrior apprentices - which were all toms, obviously - decided to gang up on the two. "What's this?" The largest one taunted, a gray tabby with blue eyes. "Tight as brothers, huh?" He snorted, looking at Lostkit.

"Too bad this one isn't a brother," one of them smirked, a cream-colored tom with green eyes as he gazed at Lostkit. He picked the she-cat up by her scruff and firmly dropped - literally, dropped - some way away.

Another cat - a gray she-cat with greenish-blue eyes walked up to the first one with a small whine. The gray cat growled, as did the one next to him, whom was a ginger tom with bright green eyes and a scar on his cheek.

"Rockpaw!" The she-cat whimpered. "Stop it. They're not doing anything to you." She pointed out with a kittish look in her eyes. They were siblings - you could tell by their similiarities.

"Go away, Pebblepaw," the ginger one snapped.

"No, Fernpaw. Not until you leave them alone." Pebblepaw said softly.

The cream tom snarled. "I got this one!" He growled as he headbutted Pebblepaw away. Pebblepaw stumbled backwards, but otherwise held her ground as she tried to break up the three cats from messing with the two kits.

"They're just kits, though, Milkpaw!" Pebblepaw mewed. "You're not allowed to hurt them! You're not even allowed to hurt *she-kits* without breaking the Warrior Code!" Pebblepaw said. Rockpaw unsheathed his claws and flexed them as he thought.

"Fine," he growled. "When you all are apprentices, that's when we'll get you ... except perhaps you, Pinekit. You look ... exceptionally talented." He said, and with that, he
turned with the other two cats following close behind him, practically flanking him.

Pebblepaw scrambled back up to her paws and scanned the other two. "I'm sorry about that! Rockpaw is just really obnoxious and he ... " she lowered her voice so her brother wouldn't be capable of hearing her. " ... is honestly a terrible warrior, which is why he bullies everyone, especially the kits like yourselves." She sighed.

Pinekit nodded, then walked over to Lostkit. He helped her back up to her paws. "That's alright. But what did he mean by calling me exceptionally talented?" Pinekit questioned, confused.

"It means that he wants you to join his posse. I wouldn't suggest doing it. They're really just a ragtag group of cats that have no respect for anyone, not even Froststar. All they do is cause trouble and be mean to all of the other apprentices and kits." Pebblepaw shrugged. "They're especially mean to the she-cat's. It's not hard to tell why, either." She frowned at the thought being settled into her

mind.

Lostkit looked at her brother. "You won't ever join their group, will you?" She asked, flicking her ears in hope that Pinekit would say no.

"Of course not!" Pinekit said, offended. "Why would I ever join those bullies? Altogether they are worse than Ratbite and Snakeheart!" Pinekit meowed. The elders often told legends of those two cats - Ratbite and Snakeheart. They were both mates, and often caused mischief in the forest ... terrible mischief. They are said to have originated from CloudClan, the Clan who lives in the open area of the forest - otherwise known as the meadow. But nevermind that - the two mates had murdered many cats in their lifetime, and soon they had kits ... expected to be their heirs. When their kits started disobeying them and doing good deeds, like helping others and giving prey to others, the two murdered their own kits. Soon, however, they had been killed - Ratbite was killed by CloudClan, with Snakeheart - the she-cat, of course - having been killed by MapleClan.

"Okay, you are right." Lostkit meowed. "You would never join them! I was being stupid just by even saying that. I'm sorry, Pinekit." She meowed, flattening her ears a bit. She saw Toadleap exit the entrance of the medicine cat's den with a bundle of herbs strapped in his jaws. He was heading towards the warrior's den, for what reason Lostkit did not know. He was probably just dealing with a sick cat or something. Without waiting for a response from her brother or Pebblepaw, Lostkit bounded straight up to the medicine cat. "Hi!" She said, causing him to jump.

"Hello, Lostkit." Toadleap greeted, his voice muffled by the herbs so much that is was quite hard to understand. "How are you?" He purred, dropping the herbs to speak better to the kit..

"I'm doing great!" She meowed. "What'cha have those herbs for?" She meowed.

Toadleap frowned. "There is a wounded warrior that I have to take care of. His right ear was ripped completely off - terrible, hm? A lot of strange things like these have been happening lately." He pointed

out.

"That's weird." Lostkit said.

"Yes, you are right." Toadleap said. "Now then, I should get going. I do not have all day." He said, picking his bundle of herbs back up into his jaws and leaving. Lostkit watched the tom as he entered the warrior's den so that he could tend to whatever cat it was that had been wounded by whatever had wounded him.

Chapter Four

One moon later, Lostkit had officially became an apprentice by the name of Lostpaw. Though she, of course, was not a warrior's apprentice, but a she-cat apprentice. A she-cat apprentice was, really, the lowest rank in MapleClan - lower than a kit, an apprentice, a warrior, an elder, a medicine cat, their apprentice, the deputy, and the leader ... Obviously, only she-cats could become she-cat apprentices, as it was in the name. They were to be yet an apprentice until they found a mate and birthed their first litter of kits, which is when they became a she-cat, the highest rank a she-cat can usually climb up to, but still low in the hierarchy.

Yesterday was when Lostpaw had officially been given the rank of a she-cat apprentice by Froststar. He had called a meeting and the cats were to gather up - that was the day when Lostpaw became a she-cat apprentice and Pinepaw became a warrior's apprentice, which was higher than, well, Lostpaw's rank. Everybody in the Clan had cheered for Pinepaw when he was appointed - the she-cat's were forced to, anyways - but nobody had said a single word when Lostpaw was appointed she-cat apprentice, possibly because it was so low that there wasn't anything worth congratulating her for.

Now Lostpaw was curled up underneath a large overhang, which was really just a rock jutting out from a wall that was very drafty. She had been sleeping underneath it for one night, and so far, she knew that the den wasn't a good one. One reason was because at nighttime the breeze always ruffled her fur, making it cold and hard to sleep. The only warmth she could rely on was from the body heat of the other she-cat's sleeping next to her, which wasn't much. Only about four other she-cat apprentices shared the den with her, which was way less than the amount of tom apprentices that slept in an actual den instead of a cliff overhang.

When Lostpaw had awoken, she could already see that the other she-cat apprentices were awake except one. If she had heard correctly, her name was Berrypaw, but she wasn't sure. She pulled

herself up from her nest, which was only a single patch of moss, and shook the dirt out of her fur before walking outside of the den to accompany Pebblepaw outside, sitting. She sat down next to her. "What are we supposed to do?" She meowed.'

Pebblepaw shrugged. "We are supposed to stay here." That confused Lostpaw so much that it made her blink. She thought that this was supposed to be a low rank where you were required to work 24/7.

"What do you mean?" Lostpaw meowed. "That seems more like a luxury to me. Not having to patrol, hunt, fight, or heal and instead just staying here to do absolutely nothing except sleep, eat, chat, and play around." She said.

Pebblepaw shook her head. "No, you misunderstood me." She said. "We do not have to patrol, hunt, fight, or heal. Yes, that is true. But that is only because we are not allowed to. Besides, this life is not luxurious. I would like to be able to see the outside of camp, thank you very much." She said, finishing it off sharply.

Lostpaw flinched back, not used to listening to this type of language. "I'm sorry," she mewed, sighing. "Was that a sensitive spot? I'll just leave. I don't want to make you feel any worse." She said, about to leave when Pebblepaw cut her off.

"No, it's fine." Pebblepaw sighed. "I just really don't enjoy this type of life. Unlike what you said, we do not get to stay here and do absolutely nothing. The other apprentices, like the three you saw earlier - Milkpaw, Rockpaw, and Fernpaw - often bully us, and the warriors usually don't cause any physical harm, but emotional, yes, because they yell at us. See, all of the toms in the Clan boss us around, and we have to do what they say unless we get in trouble. If we disobey, it is a possibility that we can get either attacked - which is allowed - or yelled at." She said.

Lostpaw frowned, flattening her ears at the thought of getting attacked by another warrior in the Clan. *'That sounds a bit too much like breaking the Warrior Code,'* she thought to herself earnestly. "Oh. Well, I guess that's not how I imagined it, then. So it's not so luxurious ... " her thoughts trailed off to thinking about what Minnowcreek and Cherryflower had been saying when Sunkit died.

That she wouldn't have wanted a shot at this type of life anyways. Now Lostpaw could truly understand the reason why to all of that ... truly, she could.

Pebblepaw nodded. "It's fine," she said. "I was just like you when I became an apprentice - " she paused as she looked around, seeing a tom. " - a*she-cat* apprentice, I mean." She corrected herself before continuing. "I was so confused and lost - no pun intended - by this as well." She said. "Sorry for being such a hypocrite about this," she added.

Lostpaw blinked and nodded. She really had no idea what a hypocrite even was, and planned on learning about it later, but decided not to pester Pebblepaw about it right now. She'd just wait until she was being less moody to ask because she was simply just afraid of upsetting her more than she already had about a she-cat apprentice's duties.

Chapter Five

Shortly after Lostpaws, well, discussion with Pebblepaw, she was allowed to get a meal from the fresh-kill. The she-cat apprentice's were always the last ones to eat, meaning that they normally got stuck with the scrawny prey while the warriors and apprentices always got the plump ones. She was about to get her pick of prey where Pinepaw invited her over to join him in his meal. She padded over, laying down next to her brother. He had picked out a large mouse - her favorite, too.

"How's your training? Have you gotten to do anything yet?" Lostpaw mewed as she took a bite of prey. Her whiskers twitched uncomfortably as she spotted a few toms giving disgusted looks at her and Pinepaw sharing food together, but they didn't say anything, so Lostpaw ignored them and continued gazing at Pinepaw.

"It's doing great! I already caught my first prey - it was a thresh! A skinny thing, but still prey!" He meowed, flicking his ears in happiness at the thought of that - it was his first hunting session and his first prey! Lostpaw already knew that the other warriors would be proud of him and the other apprentices would be jealous. She wondered if Fernpaw, Milkpaw, and Rockpaw would've been there to watch him. She smirked at the thought, but then Pinepaw cut her off from her thinking as he spoke. "So how's your time as an apprentice been?" He asked.

"Wish you wouldn't have asked. Should've seen it comin', though,' she thought to herself silently before answering. "It's been boring. We can't do anything except be bossed around by warriors and even the normal apprentices!" She sighed.

"That's stupid," Pinepaw said, lowering his voice. MapleClan had always been like this - ever since Maplestar, the founder of the Clan, had created it. Lostpaw could only wish that she'd been born in one of the other Clans - WolfClan, especially - instead of MapleClan. But she could only wish. She'd never be able to escape

from this place until her death, she knew. "I think she-cat's should be equal to the toms. They can be just as strong and they're even better at us than some things," he admitted. "Like most she-cats are more flexible than us, which makes them better at climbing, which would make them good at hunting prey like squirrels and birds," he meowed.

Lostpaw nodded. "I know," she sighed. "But I guess it just isn't meant to be. Not in MapleClan ... " she said, resting her head on her paws. Her gaze flickered between every cat that passed by her, then back to Pinepaw every few seconds or so. Soon she could spot the familiar shape of three bulky toms - great, just what they needed. Pinepaw stood up.

"Go away." He growled. "We don't need you here. Scat. No one likes you." He hissed, shoving his ears straight up as if trying to seem threatening. Even Lostpaw knew that Pinepaw wouldn't be capable of doing anything against even one of those toms. Neither could she, but she stood up anyways.

Rockpaw laughed, and the others joined in. When he finished laughing the others kept laughing, literally throwing fits about it, and Rockpaw glared behind his shoulder at them. "Shut up," he snarled. "When I stop laughing, you stop laughing." He ordered.

Milkpaw gulped, and Lostpaw could see Fernpaw flinch. "Sorry, Rockpaw," they both said, immediately snapping their muzzles shut. Then Rockpaw turned back to look at the measly apprentice in front of him, and the she-cat apprentice on the other side of that tom.

"What do we have here, then?" He smirked. "Like I said, we have some unfinished business to attend to ... since you all are now ... apprentices." He put emphasis on the word "apprentice," directing his gaze towards Lostpaw as he did so. Though he had some sort of twinkle in his eye ... a softening, perhaps? Was he softening? No way. That was impossible for him.

"Is there a problem?" Pinepaw growled, stepping up in front of Lostpaw. Lostpaw growled a bit as well, getting quite tired of her brother protecting her. She didn't want to get hurt, but she didn't want her brother protecting her. That just portrayed her off as being

weak, which would hurt what little of a she-cat's reputation that they actually have.

Rockpaw smiled wickedly. "Why yes, there is." He smirked.

Chapter Six

"Really? And what might that be?" Pinepaw demanded, snarling. Lostpaw took a deep breath as she awaited Rockpaw's reply - it wasn't hard to tell that it would be one that would sting from the way he kept glaring at the two cats.

All of the softening that Lostpaw had suspected she had seen in Rockpaw's eyes had disappeared, and instead it was replaced by bloodthirstiness ... Lostpaw gulped, actually scared now, and taking a step behind Pinepaw. Rockpaw didn't answer Pinepaw, and instead swerved his head around to look at Lostpaw. "Well, well. You're actually scared? I'm not surprised. *Everyone* is scared of me." Rockpaw hissed. Lostpaw doubted that - the warriors were way stronger than him, and she knew as a matter of fact that the Clan leader, Froststar, wouldn't be scared of an apprentice who looked scrawny compared to his massive bulk.

Lostpaw didn't say anything. Rockpaw walked closer. "Well? You going to say anything, *she-cat?"* he demanded, glaring even harder at Lostpaw. Milkpaw and Fernpaw backed him up, getting on either side of him so that he was in the middle and growling.

"Yeah, ya goin' to say anythin' or what?" Milkpaw asked. Rockpaw glanced back at the two rookies that were practically his sidekicks and spat at them.

"Let me handle this," the stronger apprentice demanded. Milkpaw quickly nodded, and, without hesitation, backed off away from the three cats so that they could handle the situation by themselves. Fernpaw followed, backing off also.

"Good," Rockpaw said. "I'll call for you if I need anything. Which I won't, so don't get your hopes up." He said in a bit too much of a cocky tone for him. Even cockier than it usually was, surprisingly. "Now then," Rockpaw stomped forward so that he was towering over Pinepaw. The measly apprentice didn't flinch, and the she-cat cowered down.

"I see. One scaredy-cat and one false hero. What a pair of siblings." He said. Pinepaw didn't say anything, and neither did Lostpaw. Pinepaw wasn't speaking because he was being defiant, and Lostpaw wasn't speaking because she was too scared to actually say anything to him, fear that he would hurt her or maybe even kill her. It was allowed, and you didn't need an excuse as to why ... not in MapleClan.

"What's the matter?" Rockpaw hissed, clearly annoyed by the lack of conversation. "Cat got your tongue? Speak!" He snarled, then, slowly, he seemed to process the information into his brain. "Oh. Well then, I see. You're being defiant, huh? Fine. Just give me the she-cat." He smiled wickedly.

"No way," Pinepaw growled. Rockpaw rolled his eyes, then, darkly, he knocked Pinepaw out of the way with his massive set of paws and walked over to Lostpaw, who was cowering down even harder.

Lostpaw didn't know what to do. She wasn't exactly the strongest cat in the Clan, and she couldn't run because he could easily catch up with her and hurt her ... the she-cat apprentice cowered down as much as she could, hiding her face with her paws.

"P-please ... don't hurt me." She managed to squeak. This was so unlike her - she was ashamed of herself right now by being so submissive, but she couldn't help it. The fear instinct had come over her. She didn't want to get hurt.

Rockpaw unsheathed his claws and bared his fangs. He was about to lunge, then suddenly stopped and collected himself. "Hmm ... what may I ... what may I do to you?" He questioned himself as he then began circling the she-cat apprentice. Then his eyes twinkled. "Ah! I have an idea. Let's see ... you become mates with me when I am a warrior, which won't be long now, then I won't hurt you or Pinepaw. Deal." He said. It was clear to Lostpaw that it wasn't a question. It was an order.

Lostpaw quickly nodded as to not get him angry. "Okay, okay! I'll do it. That's fine with me! I'll do anything as long as you don't hurt me ... " she mewed out. Rockpaw smiled as if complimenting and congratulating himself for getting a she-cat, then turned, walking

away with Milkpaw and Fernpaw then following,

Lostpaw quickly got to her paws and scrambled over to her brother in order to make sure that he was safe. She knew for a fact that what the bully had did to him must have hurt him perhaps really badly and so she knew that she might have to either help him or possibly even take him to the medicine cat. When she reached him, apparently her guess had been true - blood was leaking from Pinepaw's mouth.

Lostpaw sighed. "Don't worry. The evil bully won't harm you, or me, ever again. I swear." Lostpaw mewed. Pinepaw reached up so that he was succumbing into a sitting position, and nodded, though concerned.

"Are you okay?" He asked his sister, worried as he began searching the she-cat for any possibly wounds, which he found none.

"You should be asking yourself the same question." Lostpaw mewed softly.

"Well, don't worry about me. I was just trying to protect you, Lostpaw." Pinepaw said. "Anyway, what'd you do to convince him not to hurt us?" He asked with morbid curiosity as he flicked his ear.

"Nothing." Lostpaw responded. "He said that if I became his mate once he was a warrior, then he wouldn't hurt me or you ever again." Lostpaw said.

Pinepaw was shocked. "Really? If he had a crush on you then why would he've tried to hurt you and bully you in the first place ... I mean, I know this is MapleClan though still. Where is the logic in that?" he asked. "Anyway, did you agree?"

Lostpaw then recalled how she had thought she saw Rockpaw's eyes twinkling and softening earlier ... that must've been it! He loved her since he first met her, she supposed. A strange tom he was ... though very interesting. Lostpaw could tell that he wasn't all that he seemed to be. "Yes, I obliged. I agreed. As long as it meant to have you never be hurt again." The words halfway choked in her throat,

but she swallowed it down.

"You ... you agreed?" Pinepaw mewed, confused. This clearly was not the answer that he had expected. "What? For me? You didn't want me to get hurt? I mean, that's brave and all, but really? Am I really worth it?" He asked.

"Yes, you are worth it. Don't ever think you're not, Pinepaw." Lostpaw mewed, standing up. "Sunkit is dead. You are the only sibling I have left. Cherryflower has a new litter of kits and little to no time for us. You are practically the only thing that I have left in this world. The only one who would ever dare to stand up for me. Trust me, you are worth it." She said, nuzzling her brother gently.

Pinepaw sighed. "You're great, Lostpaw." He said. "You really are."

*Chapter Seven

Cherryflower was a very popular she-cat in the Clan. A lot of the toms wanted to breed with her - usually her kits turned out gorgeous, like her. For example, Lostpaw - and so she was already settled down with her third litter of kits. Her "breeding partner" or "mate," as she liked to call Newtheart whom insisted that he was actually her "owner" had forced her to have a new litter of kits, one with more toms this time instead of she-cats.

Newtheart this time had named them Bearkit, Badgerkit, Wolfkit, and Foxkit. *'Of course. Leave it to him to make them all want to sound like little demons focused on eating our souls.'* Cherryflower thought distastefully. Though at least they were all toms, much to Newtheart's favoritism. "You know," the tom had been bragging one time earlier that day. "I think my blood is really getting into yours. You know, the good type of blood. 'Else we wouldn't have had four toms in the litter this time! Pinekit had been the only tom in the litter last time, and must I tell you, he's been doing good in his training! He caught a thresh on his first hunting patrol." Newtheart purred.

'I know that,' Cherryflower thought grimly. *'I'm his mother.'* Though instead of responding to him with her thoughts, she just nodded. "Yes." She mewed. "I am proud of him." She added. Newtheart nodded.

"You should be - everyone should be. Now let me see those little kits of mine." he ordered. Cherryflower couldn't help but note that he had put emphasis on the word "mine." *'What a shame,'*she thought rather grimly.

"Yes Newtheart," Cherryflower nodded, and got up, so that her "mate" would be capable of seeing the four toms in her litter fully. Bearkit was a pure brown tom with dull green eyes and was the biggest out of all of his siblings. Badgerkit was a black tom with specks of white on his flank and tail. He had a white underbelly and white paws equipped with hazel eyes. Then there was Wolfkit, a

rarely-colored tortoise-shell tom with ice blue eyes. And finally, there was Foxkit, a ginger cat like her, though the runt of the litter with green eyes.

"Let me see Bearkit." Newtheart demanded. Cherryflower obeyed, picking up the ragged brown kit and dropping him at Newtheart's paws gently. Newtheart studied the kit, noting how he was the biggest out of every single one of his siblings. "This one looks like a fighter," he smiled. The mewling kit looked up at his father, eyes gleaming. "You're my favorite." he said.

'Why, of course he'd choose Bearkit as his favorite. He only likes him because he's the biggest and will be the strongest.' she thought to herself grimly. *'I hope to StarClan that Newtheart won't be chosen to be* his *mentor! Or any of my other kits.'* She prayed silently, then shook her head.

"Badgerkit now." Newtheart said. Cherryflower sighed, nudging the tuxedo cat over to his father. "He is quite like Bearkit ... he will become a good warrior as well, I promise you." Newtheart said. "Now Wolfkit." He mewed.

"Good. Hello there, Wolfkit," he mewed. Wolfkit blinked up at him, gazing confusedly at the tom's face. Newtheart smirked, then snatched Foxkit away from suckling his mother's milk himself, dropping the tomcat in front of him. "Ah, Foxkit," he said distastefully, noticing his small the tomcat was. The runts of the litters were never his favorite.

"Runt," he mewed. "I should've named you Tinykit or Smallkit. Ugh, you won't do no good." He said, pushing the ginger tom away, back towards his mother. "Your mother will take care of you. You're a disgrace on all toms!" Newtheart growled. Foxkit practically ignored him and started back over to suckling on his mother's milk. Cherryflower had to force herself to hold back a chuckle as she watched the kit. "Fine then!" Newtheart said. "Ignore me. Be that way. You dumb *she*tom!" Newtheart said. Then he picked up the other three kits and vanished from the den, obviously going over to Froststar to brag about how strong they were going to be, as he always did with the toms.

Cherryflower looked down at Foxkit. "I will not let anything happen to you, Foxkit," she whispered. "*You* are my favorite." She mewed.

Chapter Eight

It was one week after the incident with Rockpaw. He hadn't bothered them so much, though every other day he occasionally stopped by Lostpaw and distracted her from whatever she was doing, starting a conversation with her. Strangely, whenever he did this, his two sidekicks in his ragtag group weren't there. Though to Lostpaw, it wasn't a surprise.

Rockpaw hadn't bothered her at all today, meaning he hadn't stopped by to chat, and she hoped he wouldn't for awhile. Pinepaw was out on patrol today, so she had little to do. Finally, she found herself getting bored and went over to Pebblepaw so that they could go visit the elders or at least do something together. It was boring just being stuck in camp all day. The toms were the only ones that got to do anything fun!

She had been just about to approach Pebblepaw when a voice rang up from a distance. "Hey, Lostpaw!! Fetch me a mouse from the kill pile, will ya?" The voice of a senior warrior called. Lostpaw swiveled around to look and saw that it was Ravencall, the second to oldest warrior in the Clan. Lostpaw sighed and headed over to the pile, picking out the plumpest mouse she could find, then padded over to the warrior.

However, she stopped suddenly just as she was about to drop the mouse in front of the tom's paws. "Well, what's the hold up, *she-cat?* You frozen in time or what?" He said, standing up. The other warriors that he had been talking to stood up as well. It was ridiculous how superior they always tried to act like towards she-cats.

"No, I'm not frozen in time," Lostpaw began slowly, then speeded up her voice. "However, I am afraid that you may be breaking the Warrior Code. You do know that a warrior is supposed to eat after the elders and the kits, right?" She mewed. Unlike the other Clan's codes, the queens ate second to last - right after the she-cat apprentices and the she-cats.

Ravencall looked around nervously. "Well ... of course I knew that! Though they've already ate! I swear!" Ravencall mewed, quite clearly lying. Lostpaw smirked. She felt as if she was the superior one now!

"Ha! I've caught you red-handed!" She smirked. Ravencall gulped. He was aware of the fact that Froststar punished Warrior Code breakers severely, especially if they were toms because he figured that they should know better than what the she-cats knew.

"Please don't tell Froststar! Please! I'll do anything!" Ravencall mewed, trembling in his fur!

Lostpaw couldn't help but to pity him. "Don't worry, I won't," she said. "Though I will be taking this meal to the elders!" She growled, then vanished, lashing her tail. That was a good excuse to leave and go to the elder's den anyways. She heard that Thornscratch and Foxheart, the two elders of the Clan, actually treated she-cats fairly because they were old and wise and that they told good stories as well.

Lostpaw looked up and spotted Pebblepaw watching her. She flushed underneath her pelt. Had she been watching her the whole time? She was also hoping that none of the other toms had noticed her doing that little "dominance" scene as well. That would be terrible for her and many other she-cats.

"Wow," Pebblepaw breathed. "Did you really do that? That was amazing, honestly." She mewed, surprised. Lostpaw herself was surprised as well. She had been afraid to stand up to an apprentice but she wasn't afraid to stand up to a warrior! That was weird, honestly.

"Yes," Lostpaw mewed, dropping the mouse so that her voice wouldn't be muffled as she spoke "You weren't hallucinating as you watched that, I can promise you that. But trust me, I'm surprised about it myself ... " she trailed off, glancing around to see that some toms were looking at her with ... what was it? ... respect. Her eyes almost popped out of her head. "Look at how they're staring at me. Like they ... like they ... like they're proud. Like they are respecting me. That is ... " she trailed off.

" ... wonderful." Pebblepaw finished the sentence for her, smiling gently.

"Yes," Lostpaw managed to squeeze out of her throat. " ... wonderful."

Though she was cut off by the light tone of her mother, Cherryflower. "Lostpaw?" her mother mewed. "May I speak with you?" She asked. Lostpaw thought she would be in trouble for a second, though shook her head. What had she done that she could've been in trouble about with her mother?

"Sorry, Pebblepaw." She mewed as she excused herself, following after her mother into the corner of the nursery. "What is it, Cherryflower?" She asked.

"Why did you do that?" her mother asked. Though her voice wasn't strict or hard at all, it was proud and gentle.

"Because ... because it was the right thing to do?" Lostpaw said in a small tone.

"That's right, Lostpaw. I am proud of you. Most she-cats would've never been capable of standing up to a senior warrior like that, especially if it's about the Warrior Code!" She said. "I don't even think I would have been able to do that if I was your age ... but I'm glad you did." She added.

Minnowcreek, Sunflare, Rosestorm, and a couple of the other queens in the nursery, nodded and padded over. "That was so brave of you." Minnowcreek mewed. She was the eldest of all the queens, so the wisest she-cat in the Clan.

"Thank you," Lostpaw whispered, feeling as if she was crowded for nothing. "I just did what was right. I don't need all of this praise. It was only a minor code." She pointed out humbly.

"That is true," Sunflare mewed briskly, and for a minute Lostpaw thought as if she would be in trouble for saying that. "Though it is a very respectful thing to do. To stand up for the Warrior Code and defy a senior warrior, especially if you are a she-cat!" Sunflare

mewed.

Lostpaw nodded. "I know, I know you're right. Though any other she-cat would've done the same thing, right?" She asked.

"Have you listened to a single thing we've said?" Sunflare asked. "We already said that no, they would not have. Most she-cats are meek, quiet, and submissive, just as the other toms expect them to be ... very few would have ever dared to stand up for the Warrior Code or even themselves." She said.

"It's all true," Rosestorm put in. "As you know, she-cats have always been disrespected within this Clan, so they have always grown up with the thought 'let the toms handle their own problems. They don't need us. They're superior - we shouldn't help them with the Warrior Code or teach them the right thing to do because they should already know.'" She mewed.

Cherryflower, Sunflare, and Minnowcreek nodded. "Agreed." They said at the same time, then both chuckled quietly. "Listen, Lostpaw, all of us are proud of you. We saw the looks that those toms gave you, too - they're proud. They even had a look of respect! You have gone much, much farther in just these eight moons of your life than any other she-cat has done in their whole lifetime!" Cherryflower purred. "Now go. Go back to doing whatever it was that you were doing with Pebblepaw. Just know that we are all proud of you." She breathed.

Lostpaw nodded, then walked out of the nursery. She walked back over to Pebblepaw. "Well, want to go and visit the elder's?" She asked, picking up her mouse that she was going to feed the two with.

Pebblepaw couldn't believe her eyes ... or ears. Whatever. Lostpaw was seriously acting as if nothing had just happened? If she was her she would've been bragging her head off about defying that warrior who was a, well, a tom! Being able to do that must've took some major humbility, she knew. Though instead of pointing out silly things like that, she just nodded as well. "Sure," she said.

Lostpaw picked up the plump, freshly-killed mouse and nodded,

heading over to the elder's den.

Chapter Nine

Lostpaw and Pebblepaw entered the elder's den a few minutes after their little discussion. Lostpaw dropped the plump mouse as the two elder's paws and awaited their reaction. Thornscratch was the first to notice, being the youngest elder. "Oh my. That's a good mouse. Foxheart, look at it." he mewed. Foxheart grunted.

"What?" The elder said before noticing the mouse. "Oh. That's great. Did any of you catch it?" He asked. Pebblepaw and Lostpaw both looked at him weirdly. Didn't they know how the Clan treated she-cats by now?

"Sorry," Thornscratch quickly piped in. "Foxheart is losing it. We know you two didn't catch it. Right, Foxheart?" he nudged the elder whom was way past 100 moons old already.

"Huh? Oh. What? Oh? That? Yeah, I know." Foxheart mewed. Lostpaw chuckled.

"Well then, we just wanted to stop by and give you that mouse." Pebblepaw said, and they were about to leave when suddenly Thornscratch stopped them. Foxheart was disgruntled by this and looked at him.

"What? Why aren't we letting them go?" Foxheart asked. "All we need is food right now." He pointed out. Thornscratch sighed, exasperated, as he sat back down. The two she-cat apprentices glanced at eachother before sitting down as well.

"So ... what's up?" Pebblepaw broke the silence.

"Well, I was just thinking that maybe we could tell you a few stories ... like, two or three if you don't mind." Thornscratch sighed. Foxheart had been nibbling at a tick on his flank when Thornscratch said this though as he processed it, he stopped and immediately glared at the younger elder.

"What? Why are we going to tell them a story? Do we have to? That would be the ... " Foxheart trailed off for a minute, counting the toes on his paws. " ... third time today we have to tell a few cats stories!" Foxheart moaned.

"Well, listen here, Foxheart, you don't have to tell them any stories. You can just sit there and look pretty like a she-cat for all I care. But I'm going to tell them a story whether you like it or not." They bickered between eachother for a few more minutes.

"Well, I mean, I want to tell them a story, but still!" Foxheart complained.

"If you want to tell them a story than why are you complaining about it, for StarClan's sake?!" Thornscratch demanded, flicking his ears and twitching his whiskers in both, exasperation and annoyance at his denmate.

Lostpaw gazed at them, forcing herself to hold back laughter. She'd look weird if she suddenly started laughing like a maniac when the elders were fighting. She could clearly see that Pebblepaw was trying to do the same thing as well by pushing her tail against her mouth.

"So, you all going to tell us a story or not?" Lostpaw finally asked. "I mean, you don't have to, I'm not trying to sound picky. Storytelling isn't even the reason we came here in the first place." She said, picking at some moss. Thornscratch and Foxheart finally stopped bickering long enough to look at the two she-cats.

"Oh no, we're going to tell you a story. Right, Foxheart?" He said, looking at Foxheart with a cross look.

"Right." Foxheart forced himself to say.

"Our first story is going to be called *Falconswoop and the Two-Headed Badger."* Thornscratch mewed. "Would you like to do this one, Foxheart?" He asked. Foxheart nodded and began.

"Back in the ancient times when ShadowClan still ruled the forest alongside RiverClan, WindClan, and ThunderClan, there was a

warrior named Falconswoop. Falconswoop was one of the strongest warriors in all of ShadowClan, but he wanted to earn the title of deputy. So he decided to prove himself to his leader by slaying the two-headed badger, a creature that often snuck into camp and snatched cats away. His Clanmates said he was foolish to even try, but Falconswoop was determined. So he set out at dawn in search of the mighty beast." Lostpaw couldn't help but note how good of a storyteller Foxheart was.

"Falconswoop searched without luck until nightfall, when he heard a rustle in the undergrowth. He froze, his pelt well camouflaged with a thick coat of mud. Sure enough, out came the ferocious beast, lumbering towards him clumsily. His two heads turned towards Falconswoop, his bright red eyes locking on his. Without warning, the badger attacked, swiping his paw at the ShadowClan warrior. Terrified but determined to succeed, Falconswoop raced up the nearest tree trunk and slipped onto one of the branches. The badger smashed his paws against the trunk, trying to shake Falconswoop down. Eventually, an enormous crack pierced the cool night air, and the tree fell to its doom. But instead of falling away from the badger, it fell on top it, crushing the beast with it's weight." Foxheart paused for dramatic affect.

"Falconswoop returned to camp with the limp body of the badger, and became the next Clan deputy for his success."

"Wow," Pebblepaw breathed. "That sure was a great story."

"It sure was." Lostpaw agreed coolly.

"Well, Foxheart, what's the other story you planned on telling?" Thornscratch asked. Foxheart looked at him weirdly and he sighed, walking over to the old tom and whispering in his ear.

"Oh, right. That one." Foxheart mewed, and Thornscratch nodded. "This one is about a very evil queen, called *Icethorn and the Missing Kits*." Foxheart mewed, then began.

"It had only been a pawful of moons since WolfClan had finally begun to prosper. Everyone was well-fed and strong as ever, and kits were blossoming at every corner. It was the perfect time for the

Clan, with plenty of food and peace. Everything was quiet, until one morning. A queen's wail in distress broke the early silence. One of her kits was missing. A search party went out to search for the missing kitten, only to find it dead in a rabbit's hole. The Clan assumed that they'd snuck out of camp and fallen in by mistake. Everything was quiet once again, but a few days later another queen was set into panic. Two out of her three kits were missing. This time, when they found the kits, the cause turned out to be deathberries. A pattern of missing kits began to emerge, every few days one more being snatched away. Nearly every litter was affected; all but one."

"A Siamese queen had a litter of three, born in the middle of kitting season. They were neither the youngest nor the oldest kits in the nursery, but lost somewhere in the middle. While all the other queens progressively lost more kits, not one of the cold queen's kits was found among the dead. Cats soon grew suspicious, and rumors began spreading around camp. One morning, the Clan awoke not only to find Icethorn missing but one of her kits as well. They found the queen with the limp body of her kit in her jaws, it's fur stained scarlet. Driven out of the Clan and exiled, the Clan deemed that it was Icethorn behind these missing kits all along.

Seasons have gone by, but queens still tell their unruly little ones that, "if you don't behave, Icethorn will visit you in the night.'" Foxheart finished the second story.

"Does that sound familiar to any of you young'uns?" Thornscratch asked.

"I can remember Cherryflower saying that to me a couple of times." Lostpaw mewed. Her memories of that were faint, however, but still there, because she was rarely unruly back in her kithood days.

"I can remember my mother saying that to me, too." Pebblepaw nodded in agreement.

"Right. So now you all know the reason why." Thornscratch mewed, flicking his ears. "Well, I'll do the last story for you all." He said. "This one is called *Swanfrost's Medicine,* another one about a she-cat." He said before finally starting on with the story.

"Many moons ago in the time of the old four Clans that stood by the lake. The Clans were the fast WindClan. The brave ThunderClan. The loyal WindClan and the greatest of all, the powerful ShadowClan. In ShadowClan there were two medicine cats, well one was still an apprentice. Swanpaw had never seen StarClan, instead she had visited the Place of No Stars countless times."

"There were two medicine cats and Swanpaw was tired of being pushed around. She persuaded Smokeheart, he mentor, to collect some herbs that grew near the river and as soon as they arrived she drowned him. She cred crocodile tears when they mourned for him and then she got her name, Swanfrost." Thornscratch paused for a minute, before once again, continuing with the stories.

"Weeks later, Grayclaw, a new warrior, suspected Swanfrost of murdering Smokeheart, but everyone always said, "why would she? She's a medicine cat." Soon, to everyone's horror, they found Grayclaw lying in the medicine cat's den, dead. Swanfrost was summoned to examine the body. He had been killed by a badger. Now everyone was growing suspicious of the white feline. A few days later, a whole litter of kits had died, found next to a deathberry plant. Rumors were flying around now that it was "StarClan's punishment." Redstar had finally worked out who had been killing the cats, but all of a sudden, a fire engulfed the land around the lake. What they found when the fire had died was unforgettable. The claws of Swanfrost sunk deep into her leader's throat, a final smile twisting her face.

We tell this story to make you remember that you should respect the medicine cat unless you want Swanfrost's medicine." Thornscratch finished.

"Well, I certainly wouldn't want that kind of medicine from Toadleap!" Pebblepaw exclaimed. Lostpaw nodded in agreement.

"We wouldn't either," Thornscratch said for both of them, Foxheart and Thornscratch.

"Wait, wait, wait! Who said I wouldn't want Swanfrost's medicine?! You? You can't make my mind up for me. Now, I don't want to die and whatnot, but you have no right to make my mind up for me!"

Foxheart growled.

Thornscratch sighed. "See, this I what I have to deal with everyday." He mewed. "Now leave, before me and Foxheart here start bickering again." He ordered.

Lostpaw and Pebblepaw obliged, padding out of the elder's den while snickering quietly to themselves.

Chapter Ten

Lostpaw looked over at Pebblepaw. She didn't know what they could do now - afterall, she-cats normally could only do things inside of the camp. As Whiteclaw had stated when she was just a kit, she-cats weren't allowed outside of camp. Most had never even see the real beauty of nature. "What should we do now, Pebblepaw?" She asked.

Pebblepaw looked at her with a sly smile, then glanced around the camp before quickly turning back towards Lostpaw. "I have been thinking for awhile that maybe we should ... sneak out of camp. You know, just over to that waterfall on the far east end of the territory and back. Nobody'll ever notice." She said in a quiet, hushed voice into Lostpaw's ear.

Lostpaw perked up at this. "Really? But Pinepaw's patrol is still out there! We shouldn't. I mean, I'd like to see what it all looks like, but I can't. We could get caught, and then what will happen?" She asked.

"Oh, calm down!" Pebblepaw barked. "It'll be fun and you know it. Besides, there's no need to fret if you know that we aren't ever gonna get caught outside of camp in the first place! So, come on." Pebblepaw turned, seeing that the cats in the Clan were all tucked inside of their dens, and then sashayed out of the camp, not bothering to look behind her shoulder to see whether or not the younger apprentice was following.

Lostpaw reluctantly followed behind Pebblepaw, her paws and tail dragging against the ground. "Do we really have to do this?" She complained. Though her next sentence was cut short as she saw the forest - it was beautiful. Thick, woody trees with bright green leaves that towered up high above her and Pebblepaw's heads. Plenty of bushes, plants, and undergrowth covering the ground as well as roots. She almost tripped over a few though managed to stop herself just in time.

Lostpaw and Pebblepaw continued stalking among the bushes. Lostpaw continuously tried seeing if she could find any prey, like voles or threshes, but she couldn't find any. She shrugged her shoulders and then continued following behind Pebblepaw.

Soon, however, she heard a twig snap in front of her, and she jumped inside of a nearby bush with Pebblepaw closeby in a different one. Voices started murmuring. "What if that's prey?" "What was that?" and "That was an awful loud snap to just be prey!" One voice in particular stood out from the rest - Pinepaw.

"I'll check it out. You all stay here." And before came any protests, Pinepaw was already on his way over to the bush, sniffing. What was that ... Lostpaw and Pebblepaw? Two she-cat's? What would they be doing out here?

"Lostpaw, Pebblepaw," Pinepaw growled. "What are you doing outside of camp?! You know you could get caught and possibly even killed by Froststar himself!" Pinepaw pointed out angrily but quiet enough so that the rest of the patrol wouldn't be capable of hearing him.

"I know. Pebblepaw wanted me to go so I did." Lostpaw whispered back to her brother. "Besides, we're only going to the waterfall and back, right?" A nearby bush rustled in response. "Right." Lostpaw replied for her friend, then looked back towards Pinepaw.

"We were just about to head that way, but I guess I'll take care of it. I'll tell that I patrolled the area earlier and that there's nothing there. Be careful, though, Lostpaw." He reached over, liching his sister between the ears before leaving to catch up with the rest of the patrol.

"It was nothing. Probably just the wind." Was what both Lostpaw and Pebblepaw heard Pinepaw saying before he started lying to them about the perimeter of the waterfull and thus nothing having been there when he checked that part of the territory earlier. Lostpaw smiled slightly because her brother had helped her, then jumped out of the bushes along with Pebblepaw.

Quietly, they began moving their way past the undergrowth once

again. This time, Lostpaw found herself ahead of Pebblepaw. Soon she began to hear the loud rushing of water. She knew that they could speak without having to whisper now; the waterfall would drown out their voices. "That ... that's beautiful, Pebblepaw. How did you know it was here?"

"Easy. I heard the warriors talk about it after they had finished patrolling. You know, **you can find out a lot of things if you actually decide to listen.**" Pebblepaw pointed out briskly.

"Yeah, I mean, I know that. I just never really bothered to pay attention to a lot of the warriors in this Clan ... for obvious reasons." She mewed. Pebblepaw nodded in agreement.

"I don't talk to a lot of 'em either. Usually just the friendly ones. Anyways I figure we should get going. We don't want the Clan, especially Froststar, to start growing suspicious." Pebblepaw pointed out.

Lostpaw nodded. "Yeah, you're right." Pebblepaw ignored her words of agreement and started trotting on ahead, back towards camp. Lostpaw was close behind her when all of a sudden she started hearing sharp mewling that slowly started growing fainter every single time - Lostpaw perked up her ears and steered away from the direction of camp, instead walking over to where she had heard the distant mewling. Once she arrived, she found a tiny, brown she-kit with bright green eyes and white markings. She recognized the kit as Seedkit - Sunflare's only she-kit of her first litter.

The she-kit was wounded - a large gash was staining her left side crimson. Lostpaw picked up the kit and padded back towards camp. Immediately, she walked over to the medicine cat's den and dropped the kit inside, where Toadleap was standing as if he had been waiting for her. "What happened?" The medicine cat demanded. Lostpaw gulped, pausing. Should she tell him?

Was he a good enough friend to trust him? "I ... I'll tell you later." Finally, she mewed, before padding off back towards the she-cat apprentices den.

Chapter Eleven

For now, Lostpaw decided, she would talk to Pebblepaw. She knew that the apprentice would probably be wondering where she had went. She had also noticed that Pinepaw's patrol had came back - whatever, first she needed to talk to Pebblepaw. She flicked her tail, padding over to her best friend whom was currently discussing with another she-cat apprentice, one Lostpaw didn't recognize.

Pebblepaw must've heard her walking, because as soon as she approached, Pebblepaw had already turned to look at her friend. "Hey, Lostpaw," she mewed. "Come on over." She mewed as if nothing had just happened. She quietly padded over, gazing at the she-cat apprentice warily, as if she couldn't trust her. "This is Breezepaw, one of the other she-cat apprentices in this Clan. She's new here because she was a kittypet before she joined."

"Kittypet? Why would she give up the easy life to join MapleClan? I can understand it with any of the other Clans, like CloudClan or WolfClan, but when it comes to this Clan, well, no, not really ... " she said.

"I actually believe in this system," the apprentice Breezepaw said. "She-cats are, truly, inferior to toms. In all three, intelligence, speed, and strength." Breezepaw stated. Now both Lostpaw and Pebblepaw were staring at her with a blank look.

"Really?" Pebblepaw asked.

"Seriously?" Lostpaw asked. "Your way of speaking is actually more intelligent than any of the toms in MapleClan." Lostpaw pointed out. Pebblepaw snickered quietly, flicking her ears as she knew it was true.

"Besides, the kittypet life was too easy." Breezepaw said. "I like being given a challenge. It wouldn't be fun without them." Breezepaw mewed.

"That's true," Lostpaw admitted.

"But the challenge for you now is to act meek, submissive, and totally mouse-brained in front of toms. Think you can handle that?" Pebblepaw asked.

"That does not sound too hard. I like the harder ones." Breezepaw said.

"Then maybe you shouldn't have joined. That's the only challenge you're going to get in MapleClan and there is no way out unless you're killed or exiled." Lostpaw meowed. It was true. She-cats in the past often escaped from MapleClan by disobeying a tom's orders and getting exiled, all on purpose. However, sometimes, it turned out wrong - the Clan leader would instead kill them, though that didn't happen often. It was a rarity, but had happened before. Ever since Lostpaw was born, none of the she-cats had tried to escape in that way, however.

"Oh," Breezepaw mewed. "Well, I still do not regret my decision. We she-cats clearly need to be put into our places ... " Lostpaw studied her some more and decided that she didn't look like a former kittypet. For one thing, if she had only joined recently, then her belly would still be plump from all of the free food that tastes like rabbit-droppings the twolegs would be giving her ... instead, her stomach wasn't flat, but wasn't plump, either - as a matter of fact her stomach looked exactly like what a cat from one of the other Clan's would look like right now. She also acted older than she apparently was.

Lostpaw decided to shake it off. It was probably nothing. She was simply jumping to conclusions. "I do not see why you do not regret your decision. You have no free-will here in MapleClan." *'You also act much too humble,'* Lostpaw added in her mind thoughtfully.

Just then, a voice rung out above the clearing. They all looked up to see that Frostar was calling for the newcomer, Breezepaw. "Yes, sir!" Breezepaw meowed, walking over. "I will humbly serve you whenever you ask ... " then she disappeared inside of the Clan leader's den, Froststar in the front.

Lostpaw shook her head as she watched the apprentice. "So what took you so long?" Pebblepaw finally asked as Lostpaw had expected her to sometime or another.

"I heard the mewlings of an injured kit, so I had to go check it out. Turns out, it was one of Sunflare's kits, Seedkit. She had a wound in her side. Toadleap is taking care of her now." She responded.

"Oh," Pebblepaw responded. "Hmm ... that's strange." She finally declared. "I take it you should go talk to Toadleap about that now?" She asked.

"Oh, yes!" Lostpaw perked up, then raced towards the medicine cat's den. She had forgotten about her promise to Toadleap because of her experience with the much-too-humble Breezepaw. She was sure that the she-cat would be creeping the toms out by the time they had realized how humble she acted.

"Toadleap?" Lostpaw called as she entered the large den. Currently there were no sick or injured cats besides Seedkit, whom was still getting treated by Toadleap. Toadleap looked up. "Oh, yes." He mewed. "Please tell me how you found the kit."

"Right," Lostpaw cleared her throat, sitting down and shuffling her paws before beginning. "Can I ... can I tell you a secret?" She asked.

"Of course," Toadleap said.

"Do you promise not to tell anyone?" Lostpaw asked.

"Yes," Toadleap answered.

"Okay. Well ... I ... I snuck out of camp earlier." She wouldn't mention that both her and Pebblepaw had snuck out. If Toadleap decided to tell Frostar she wanted the blame to only be on her and not Pebblepaw.

"Yes, I noticed." Toadleap responded.

"Wait a minute, you did?" Lostpaw asked.

"Of course," Toadleap said. "I haven't told anyone about it, though."

"So you saw Pebblepaw go outside of the camp with me as well?" Lostpaw asked.

"That's right," Toadleap mewed. "I saw both of you leaving the camp. Wasn't that hard to spot from where I had been standing at the time. Luckily nobody else had saw you leaving, I don't think, 'sides me." He finished.

"Okay. Well, anyway, the way I found Seedkit was when Pebblepaw had done went back towards camp, I heard mewing. So I decided to follow the sound. And when I reached it, I realized that it was Seedkit, daughter of Sunflare. She had a large gash in her side at the time and I had no idea why, so I picked her up and brought her back to camp towards you, which you should obviously be able to tell right now." Lostpaw finished.

"I see," Toadleap responded. "Well, all I wanted to know was how you had spotted the kit in the first place. You may leave now, if you wish to do so. Or you could stand and watch, I don't mind." He said.

"I'll leave." Lostpaw answered. "I don't want to be a bother." Toadleap was about to protest about her not being a bother, but Lostpaw ignored the medicine cat and then left the den.

Chapter Twelve

"All cats old enough to catch your own prey gather beneath the Highrock for a Clan meeting!" The booming voice of Froststar called out above the clearing. Well, she-cats of the Clan couldn't exactly hunt, though since that had been a quote since the beginning of Clan-time, she figured that it meant anyone from she-cat apprentice or a normal apprentice age and up. So she gathered underneath the Highrock, in the back of course with the other she-cats.

She gazed at the leader expectantly as she waited for him to begin. "As we all know, Seedkit, one from Sunflare's first litter, had been taken and brutally wounded by someone unknown. The wounds weren't deep enough to be a badger's, nor a fox's, but that of a cat. At least, that is what Toadleap has observed." Toadleap nodded, and Froststar continued. "As I was saying - Sunflare, you will keep this kit with you at all times. Never let her out of your sight, nor any of your others. We need them if we want all Clan life to continue to sprout." He mewed.

"Now then. We also have some good news that does not involve blood and near-death experiences, I can promise you that." Froststar grinned. "Today, we have three new apprentices that are old enough to become warriors of the Clan. Rockpaw, Fernpaw, and Milkpaw, step right on up." The bulky leader commanded. The three toms obeyed, stepping up in excitement.

"I, Froststar, leader of MapleClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. He has trained hard to learn the ways of your noble code, and I comment him to you as a warrior in his turn.

"Rockpaw, do you promise to protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your life?"

"I do." Rockpaw smirked.

"Then, by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name.

Rockpaw, from this moment on, you will be known as Rockfall. StarClan honors your courage and strength, and we welcome you as a full warrior of MapleClan." Rockfall purred, then stepped back into the crowd.

Then Fernpaw stepped up and Frostar began.
"I, Froststar, leader of MapleClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. He has trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend him to you as a warrior in his turn.

"Fernpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and to protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your life?"

Fernpaw nodded. "I do."

Froststar started again. "Then by the powers ofStarClan, I give you your warrior name. Fernpaw, from this moment you will be known as Fernshade. StarClan honors your courage and loyalty, and we welcome you as a full warrior of MapleClan." Fernpaw stepped back into the gathered cats, who congratulated him.

Froststar started once again. "I, leader of MapleClan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. He has trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code, and I commend him to you as a warrior in his turn.

"Milkpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code and protect and defend your Clan, even at the cost of your life?" The leader asked.

"Of course I most definitely do!" Milkpaw said. Then Froststar glared at him. "I mean, I do." He flinched back a bit and Lostpaw rolled her eyes at him.

Froststar was still annoyed, but spoke anyways. " *Then by the powers of StarClan*, I give you your warrior name. Milkpaw, from this moment you will be known as Milkdrop. StarClan honors your courage and enthusiasm, and we welcome you as a full warrior of MapleClan." Froststar finally finished his speech.

The whole Clan cheered. "Rockfall, Milkdrop, Fernshade! Fernshade, Rockfall, Milkdrop! Milkdrop, Fernshade, Rockfall!" They all cheered until they eventually grew tired.

Froststar cleared his throat. "Meeting dismissed." He said, then went over to speak with the three new apprentices. Lostpaw knew that he would be speaking to them about their overnight vigil. She also knew that only the toms got to do the vigils. The she-cats never got anything special to celebrate with something like earning their new name. They hardly even get a worthy ceremony. Just some words that Froststar has to speak, but no cheering or anything, not like how it is with the toms.

Lostpaw growled to herself at the thought of this, though she was interrupted when a dark gray tom passed by her. Of course he would be on his way to do the vigil.Then the cat winked at her. *'Stupid Rockfall!'* she thought distastefully, then remembered something she dreaded ... she would*have* to become that monster's mate! She couldn't break her end of the deal because Rockfall has been keeping his ...

... this was not going to be fun.

Chapter Thirteen

It was one week since Rockfall, Fernshade, and Milkdrop had became warriors. Obviously, that had finished with their vigil. It was one week since Rockfall had became Lostpaw's mate. She would keep her apprentice name until she birthed her first litter of kits, whereas the time whenever she would be given the suffix of her name and promoted to the rank of a queen. It was one week since her life had turned to pure, utter -

she was cut off from her thinking by a loud, deep purring from beside her. Of course. Loverboy. Of course. "Hi, Rockfall," she mewed, fighting herself to keep her voice as neutral as possible. She didn't want to seem as if she was happy to see Rockfall, because then she'd look strange to the she-cats, but she didn't want to seem as if she was disappointed to see Rockfall, because then she'd look strange to the toms, which is even worse if you think about it. So she decided to stay right in the middle.

"Why don't you seem excited to see me?" Rockfall asked, genuinely confused.

'Thistles and thorns! It showed through?! Though he should know the answer to that anyways ... ' she trailed off and shook her head, starting to speak again. "No, no. I am excited to see you - really excited! I just have trouble showing emotions sometimes ... " she lied.

Rockfall sat, stumped, as he started to process that information into his brain. Finally, he came up with a good comeback - which even then wasn't that good. But it was good for him. "Oh, really? Well you seemed to have no trouble at all when you cowered down in fear that couple of weeks ago!" He challenged.

Lostpaw rolled her eyes. "That was then, this is now." She retorted, forcing her fur to lie flat down against her skin. She didn't want to seem agitated, which she was. If that showed through then she'd get in trouble for sure!

"You know, you need to give me respect! Just because you're my mate and I ... " the next word almost came out in a choking noise. " ... *love* you doesn't mean that you
don't have to respect me! I'm your owner, remember?" He barked.

'Yes, yes. I remember. It's kind of hard not to when you shove it down my throat everday.' Lostpaw thought, agitated still, though somehow managing to keep her cool on the outside and let all of her emotions out onto the inside.

Instead, all she said was, "Yes, you are right, Rockfall, master. I am sorry." She bowed her head in fake courtesy and respect. "I swear it will never happen again. I should respect you. Reprimand me if you wish." She mewed.

At the hardcore apology, Rockfall seemed to become calmer. "No, no, it's alright. Just try not to do it again. It's Froststar's rules." He said, then turned, walking off to go onto one of the morning hunting patrols.

Really, that wasn't even close to one of Froststar's rules. He actually treated his mates - in which he had three, which were Minnowcreek, Webpaw, and Moonshadow - rather nicely for a tom in MapleClan. For example, when he ate, he often shared prey with them. Just an example of common courtesy, Lostpaw supposed. Not that they had any that was directed towards she-cats here in MapleClan. Though still, even though it wasn't one of Froststar's rules, the toms often lied about it, thinking their she-cat companions to be dumb, and said that it was. Which some cats, like Lostpaw, weren't mouse-brained enough to actually believe it.

Lostpaw started walking off to do something when all of a sudden she bumped into a bundle of blue-gray fur. She looked up to see that it was Breezepaw. *'Not her again!'* she thought.

"I already have a mate." Breezepaw beamed, though didn't for long before going back into her usual humble, unproud position.

"How did they ... how were they not creeped out by you?" Lostpaw asked. '*Oops.'* She thought.*'Smooth move, there, Lostpaw.'* She began thinking regretfully. "I am so sorry! I didn't not mean to say that out

... loud!" *'There goes another slip. Lovely, Lostpaw. Lovely. You're on a roll today.'* she sarcastically congratulated herself in her mind.

"No need to worry about apologizing. Humbility is the key to gaining a mate to stay by your side and boss you around." Breezepaw purred.

'That ... was so blunt.' Lostpaw thought. *'And rude ... '* she added. "Why would you even want to be bossed around?" Lostpaw asked.

"It's obvious, really. It is a she-cats way to life. It's quite liberating, actually." She purred softly.

"How is being owned by someone even close to being liberating ... to being free?" Lostpaw asked.

"Well, it is liberating to please someone, hm?" Breezepaw asked, talking to Lostpaw like she was a little kit.

"I guess so."

"Well then, it is even more liberating to please your mate."

"I don't understand your knowledge."

"I don't either." Pebblepaw piped up from beside Lostpaw.

"Woah, where did you come from?" Lostpaw asked her best friend, staring at her beside her.

"The den." Pebblepaw flicked her tail over towards the den.

"Cool. Anyway, whose your mate?" Lostpaw asked, turning over towards Breezepaw.

"The one and only Firehawk, of course!" Breezepaw exclaimed, quite proud of herself. Well, Lostpaw could admit, that she would be proud of herself, too, if she was the mate of someone as charming and handsome as Firehawk, instead of that ragged old Rockfall ... eh. She';; just have to deal with it and she knew that.

"Wow. How did you get him to become mates with you?" Lostpaw

asked, trying not to make it sound rude.

"Is that supposed to be an insult?" Breezepaw asked. *'Too bad, Lostpaw.'* She thought. 'Guess it did.'

"No, it's not meant to be an insult. We're just wondering how you got Firehawk as your mate." Pebblepaw quickly put in for her friend. "Right, Lostpaw?" She mewed for confirmation.

"Right," her friend agreed, quite nervous.

"Well, as I said before, humbility is the key to life and love if you are a she-cat." Lostpaw didn't reckon she said anything about love that actually had to do with that, but didn't bother pointing out the mistake to her. "So really, I figure he enjoyed my sense of humbility and my sense of knowing my place, so he asked if he could become my mate. Instinctually, I became mates with him." Breezepaw grinned largely.

"Interesting I guess." Lostpaw said, Pebblepaw agreeing with her later.

A deep, charming voice boomed over their conversation. "Breezepaw! Please come over. I would like you to do something for me." Firehawk purred charmingly, Breezepaw instantly obeying and, without a single goodbye, let to go over to her mate, quite eager, really.

"That was blunt." Pebblepaw said.

"Rudely blunt." Lostpaw said.

"She brags to much."

"Yeah."

"She's too humble."

"No doubt about that."

"She creeps me out."

"Same here."

Finally they had finished when Pebblepaw was called over to do something as well. The last thing Lostpaw saw was Pebblepaw disappearing into the Warrior's den to attend to something. She didn't know who had called her over, just knew that the cat who had apparently needed the apprentice to do something for him didn't have a voice she recognized ...

Panicked, Lostpaw rushed into the Warrior's den just in time to see that five dark, unfamiliar, ragged, and largely built cats - three toms, two she-cats - were closing in on Pebblepaw. Immediately, Lostpaw recognized them as MeadowClan warriors. Though the name seemed pleasant, the cats in the Clan sure wasn't!

Lostpaw rung the alarm that the Clan always rung when there were intruders inside the camp or on their territory that seemed as though they were about to attack the Clan. She-cats weren't expected to know the drill but she didn't care.

The five cats in the den soon became aware of the fact that warriors of MapleClan would start surrounding them sooner or later, so they panicked, trying to flee, but there was no escape. MapleClan was closing in on all angles, with Lostpaw in the lead.

One of the five cats sneered, "Whatever! Just a bunch of MapleClan cats. No worries." He smirked, then unsheathed his claws, attacking as well as the other four cats beside him. MeadowClan cats were known for their vicious fighting moves and snake-like movements.

One of the cats in the group literally just dropped dead like it was nothing. "Well, there goes Birdflight." The other cats cooed as if they didn't care that one of their cats just died ... actually, scratch that out, they really *didn't* care that one of their cats had died. Lostpaw had noted earlier how the cat, "Birdflight," apparently, had smelt sick earlier, so that must've been the reason he dropped like a fly. Maybe he was so sick that it would've been easy for him to die ...

It was only then that Lostpaw realized they wouldn't care if they happened to kill any of MapleClan, either.

Chapter Fourteen

You know, Lostpaw thought that one reason she would never be of use to anything was because everytime she tried to do something - for example, fight - Pinepaw stepped in, desperate to protect his sister which got quite annoying for Lostpaw after awhile, to be honest. She was surprised when Pinepaw "allowed" her to sneak outside of the camp with Pebblepaw, for instance. Though she knew that if she was alone whenever she did that he definitely would not have even allowed her one fox-length around the perimeter of MapleClan camp!

And, another example, would be **right now.** "Why did you ring the alarm?" Pinepaw demanded from the back of the fighting crowd of cats. "I could've did it instead! You could've gotten killed! Why did you step in anyways?"

Lostpaw hissed, her fur bristling straight upright. "I rung the alarm because if I hadn't Pebblepaw would have been dead right now!" No answer, so she continued. "No, you couldn't have done it instead because by the time I got to you Pebblepaw would've been dead! And the reason I stepped in was because if I hadn't Pebblepaw would be dead! Do you **want** her to be dead? **Do you even care?**" She challenged.

"No, I don't want her to be dead ... " Pinepaw began slowly. "Though I also think that you should be more careful ... " he mewed.

Lostpaw stared at him. "Pinepaw! Since when does it matter? I'm just a worthless she-cat, rememeber?!" She snarled.

"No, you're not useless ... and I also think that we should actually fight now." Pinepaw said.

"Wait a minute, *we?"* Lostpaw echoed the last word as if she didn't believe it.

"Yes, we." Pinepaw said. "But be careful." he mewed, then raced off

into the crowd of fighting warriors.

Lostpaw looked to see that Pebblepaw was already fighting, and so was Webpaw, one of Froststar's mates. Though then she also managed to turn around and see that Breezepaw kept sheathing her claws and unsheathing them again, slowly ripping into the grass. She just watched, her gaze travelling over the fighting cats intently, and every once in awhile her eyes stopping on one of the four - now remaining intruders. "Well, what are you going to do?" Froststar growled from behind her. "Stand there looking pretty or fight with us?" He demanded, stealing the words right out of Lostpaw's mouth.

Even though she-cats were not taught how to fight or hunt, they were expected - actually, required - to fight in minor battles that happened within the perimeter of the camp, though not if it was outside of the camp and in the territory or even outside of the territory. The only she-cats who didn't fight were the Queens and the female kits, of course.

"Ah, yes ... " Breezepaw said. "I don't believe I can do that. Terribly sorry, sir," the apprentice said, then turned, racing off into the gloom. Which meant outside of the camp and most definitely outside of the territory, by the way.

"Traitor!" Froststar spat, anguished, as he stared after the "kittypet." He should've expected this. A kittypet - nonetheless a kittypet who was a *she-cat* - would've never been capable of fighting off pureblooded Clan warriors!

At those words Froststar had spit out of his mouth, the four warriors looked up, alarmed, and then towards the entrance of the den. They noticed that Breezepaw was gone, too, then lashed their tails, jumping over most of the MapleClan cats and disappearing outside of the camp, too. "Strange ... " Lostpaw murmured aloud.

Toadleap walked out of the medicine cat's den. "Anyone injured?!" He called out loud enough for everyone in the camp to hear him. Most of the cats had only a few minor injuries in places like their ears or their flanks, but there was one who had a gash on his side that looked identical to the wound that Seedkit had received ... the tom staggered over to the medicine cat, then collapsed in front of

his den. Toadleap frowned, dragging the tom back into the medicine cat's den.

"Froststar! Lostpaw!" The medicine cat called perhaps ten minutes later. They both rushed into the medicine cat's den just in case something had happened. Lostpaw recognized the tom to be Woodlash, Seedkit's father and Sunflare's mate.

"Someone must really have a problem with that family," Lostpaw murmured as she noticed that Woodlash was a relative to Seedkit. She shook her head after awhile and stared at Toadleap expectantly.

"Froststar, Lostpaw," Toadleap mewed. "Look at this." he ordered, and they both looked at Woodlash's gash in his side. "It's identical to Seedkit's wound." He meowed. "Lostpaw, please go bring Sunflare in here."

Lostpaw nodded. "Alright Toadleap," she mewed, then walked out of the den and over to the nursery where Sunflare was currently resting. "Sunflare!" Lostpaw mewed, and the she-cat looked up. "Toadleap needs you. Woodlash is hurt." She said. Sunflare nodded and stood up.

Sunflare looked over at the nearest queen. "Rosestorm, please watch my kits for me while I'm gone." She offered. Rosestorm nodded.

"No problem." Rosestorm responded. Then, Sunflare exited the nursery along with Lostpaw and followed her to the medicine cat's den.

"What is it? How is Woodlash hurt?" Sunflare mewed in her usual gentle, soothing voice as she padded over to her mate. Toadleap flicked his tail over the wound and Sunflare let out a breath. "My, oh, my ... " she breathed in as she stared at the wound.

"It is identical to Seedkit's," Froststar explained calmly.

"Yes it is. That was the first thing I noticed." Sunflare sighed softly as she thought about both her kit and her mate being hurt like that.

"We do not know what this means, but we think it may mean war. With who, we do not know. Maybe MeadowClan, maybe a pack of

rogues ... and why? That would be unknown as well." Toadleap explained. "Though obviously, one of the warriors in the invading group had to have been the one who caused that terrible wound unto Seedkit. We may just have to pick out who he, or possibly she, is, before they start to pick off the others." He said.

Sunflare nodded. "It is to my understanding that whatever cat it is may have a problem with me or Woodlash ... " she mewed.

"That's what I thought!" Lostpaw pointed out.

Sunflare looked over at Lostpaw, remembering that she was still there with her. "Lostpaw, I forgot to tell you this earlier - I didn't have the time with, well, kits, y'know - though I thank you for saving Seedkit's life, however way you did." She said.

"How did Lostpaw find Seedkit, anyways?" Froststar questioned, looking up. Toadleap glanced at Lostpaw, and so did Sunflare. Froststar was gazing at her with the most intently. Toadleap, however, was gazing at Lostpaw with a look that said, should I tell?

And so, taking a deep breath, she responded with,"**you may.**"

Chapter Fifteen

Toadleap began. "Well, from what Lostpaw had spoken to me about it, she has said that perhaps eight sunrises ago she and Pebblepaw snuck out of camp. You know, just to see a glimpse of the forest. Anyone would've done the same." Toadleap mewed, to make sure that Froststar would not become angry. He really liked Lostpaw - there was something special about her that seemed to separate her from the other she-cats. Though then he continued. "As I was saying, they had snuck out of camp. Now, Lostpaw didn't explain to me every single one of the details, though she had stated that when Pebblepaw rushed on ahead of her so that they may return back to camp, she lagged behind because she thought she had head the soft mewlings of a kit. And her guess was right, she had head the soft mewlings of a kit! Seedkit, as a matter of fact. So then, she returned to camp and dropped the kit off by my den." He finished.

All eyes were stuck on Lostpaw at that. "So first you spoke up to Ravencall about the warrior code - " his eye were gleaming, though then Lostpaw cut him off.

"You heard about that?! Great StarClan, how?" Lostpaw asked, hoping that he leader wouldn't be angru at her for reprimanding a warrior whom was, quite obviously, one of the toms in MapleClan.

"It is not that hard. Word spreads quickly, Lostpaw. Do not worry, I'm not even close to mad. As a matter of fact, I am, more or less, proud. I know that something like this hasn't happened in a million years." He chuckled. "Though, again, as I was saying, first you had spoken up to Ravencall, reprimanding him about the warrior code, and then you saved a wounded kit from death ... you really are something, Lostpaw." Froststar praised.

"That's right," Sunflare purred. "Lostpaw really is something."

"Sorry to ruin your Mayday Parade, but we have a little bit of a problem with Woodlash here." Immediately, everyone in the den went to attention, including Lostpaw, Sunflare, and Froststar. "He

has a chance of dying from capable bloodloss and we need cobwebs, quick. Lostpaw, fetch them from the herb storage for me! Sunflare, please get me some marigold! And Froststar, fresh bedding." he ordered. Toadleap only had the authority to command a leader to do something when he was in a crisis like this.

Lostpaw zoomed out of the medicine cat's den and over to the herb storage, which was nearby. Gently, she picked up a string of cobwebs into her teeth and strolled back over to the medicine cat's den, ignoring fishy looks that were cast her way as she passed.

Then, she dropped the clingy spiderwebs at Toadleap's paws. Quietly, he thanked her and began to work, gently pressing the cobwebs on Woodlash's side wound in order to stop the potential bloodloss so that the valuable warrior wouldn't die. Sunflare returned back with the marigold and Toadleap looked up. "Ah, he could do without them I believe!" He added, then Sunflare growled a bit because her work had been wasted, though she picked the marigold back up and left the den to return it. Lostpaw looked at Toadleap and he shrugged.

Shortly after, Froststar arrived in the medicine cat's den with fresh bedding in his paws. He dropped it at Toadleap's feet who picked them up and began carefully placing them around Woodlash in hopes of keeping the injured warrior comfortable while he was healing. "Okay, you all may leave. I can take care of it from now." He said, and they all nodded, leaving.

As soon as Lostpaw left the den she was greeted by a black and white she-cat around her age, maybe a few sunrises older, known as Bloodpaw. Not a very pleasant name for a she-cat, but a name nonetheless.

"Hi," Lostpaw mewed.

"What were you doing in there?" Bloodpaw questioned immediately, sniffing at her carefully as if wondering what she would have been doing inside of the medicine cat's den when she obviously wasn't sick or wounded in anyway.

"I was helping to heal Woodlash, why?" She mewed, confused.

"You know ... it just kind of weirds me out that a she-cat would even be allowed inside of the medicine cat's den in the first place honestly, when the medicine cat is actually a tom as they always are." She responded, flicking her ears and flexing her claws.

"Oh, come on, Bloodpaw! They're not that mean or hardcore towards she-cats if you can earn their respect like I did!" She pointed out.

"Well, I'm **not** you, Lostpaw. And I won't ever win their respect like I have with all of the she-cats. Quite a hard thing to do if you're a she-cat, y'know? Maybe you're not even a she-cat ... you have natural tom qualities anyways. Maybe you're just ... that's right. You're different from the rest of us." She smirked.

"And different makes me bad why? Everything that you don't understand you call different. Why is that? To make you feel better for yourself?" Lostpaw asked.

Bloodpaw was offended. "Um, no. Actually I feel very highly about myself just not the toms in this Clan. I also pity my own self for having been born in such an aggravating Clan like this." She growled.

"Good for you."

"You know what? I'm planning on leaving soon."

"Really? Leaving? You actually think that will work?"

"Breezepaw left."

Lostpaw's ears perked up at this. "What are you saying? Are you really trying to say that you want to follow in her pawsteps?" She challenged the other she-cat apprentice carefully, growling.

"Maybe."

"No, Bloodpaw. Your name may be fiercesome but you wouldn't survive a minute by yourself out in the woods."

"Neither would you." Bloodpaw retorted.

"Never said I would." Lostpaw pointed out, starting to become much, much calmer again. Lostpaw couldn't help but to admit that she did feel quite sorry for Bloodpaw. Afterall, her brother had died not too long ago from deathberries. Sure, the tom hadn't liked her, but he hadn't exactly hated her, either.

"Whatever." Bloodpaw growled, sinking her claws into the ground and leaving the deep marks there before turning and walking off.

Chapter Sixteen

Lostpaw growled as she watched Bloodpaw stalk away from her. Who did that apprentice think she was? And then she turned only to see the face of an anguished Firehawk whom was displeased about the fact that Breezepaw left the Clan. "Why would she ... why would she just leave me like that? Leave us?" Firehawk sniffed.

"I don't know. Maybe she had finally come to her senses about the humbility problem?" She suggested, frowning. *'Or maybe she was a traitor, as I had suspected.'* "Why would you take a kittypet as a mate anyways?" Lostpaw added dryly.

"Well, I don't ... I don't really know. I was just, kind of, like, drawn to her in a way ... " Firehawk admitted, sitting down. " ... I liked her humbility. I thought it was nice. She was really mature too. I like maturity." Firehawk sighed.

"She wouldn't have left if she loved you. She was probably just using you. I don't think you should fret about it ... " Lostpaw purred. She was actually glad about the fact that Breezepaw had left - when she left, she lured the "MeadowClanners" away and not only that, but her humbility had creeped out in the first place and Pebblepaw, too.

"I guess so," Firehawk agreed.

"Anyways, are you hurt? As in, physically?" Lostpaw asked. She already knew that Firehawk would be emotionally hurt because of the fact that Breezepaw betrayed him, all of them, by leaving the Clan. Lostpaw honestly didn't see why Firehawk had cared for her in the first place. She would never say that out loud in front of him, though. That might get him upset all over again.

"No." Firehawk sighed. "I'm really not. From what I've heard, Woodlash is the only one who got severely injured. I just got a few scratches." He mewed, indicating towards this scratch on his front left leg.

"Alright then." Lostpaw meowed, glancing at the scratch before turning and walking off.

"Wait, Lostpaw!" Firehawk said from behind her. "Thank you. I mean, for helping me about Breezepaw ... " he cleared his throat awkwardly.

"It wasn't a problem." Lostpaw purred, then continued walking just to bump into Rockfall.*'How many cats am I going to just run into today?!' She* asked herself inside of her head, frowning.

"What were you doing talking to Firehawk, exactly?" Rockfall demanded impatiently as he stared down a Lostpaw.

She shrugged. "Helping to comfort him about Breezepaw whenever she left. You know, it's really nothing to worry about, Rockfall." Lostpaw pointed out.

Rockfall glared at her. "Oh no! It is too something to worry about! Look at me, Lostpaw. Look at me." Rockfall growled even though she was already looking at him. "I do not want you ever, ever, talking to any unmated toms of the Clan unless you have my permission. Got it?" He asked.

Lostpaw frowned. "Rockfall, it's already a rule that if a she-cat has a mate she's not allowed to take on any others. Not like how it is with the high-ranking toms such as Froststar, who can have multiple mates at a time." Lostpaw stated.

Rockfall snorted. "Well, you already snuck out of camp once, breaking a rule." He growled. "Better to be safe than sorry, hm?" He chuckled harshly.

"Yeah, well, if Pebblepaw hadn't convinced me to have snuck out of camp that one day, Seedkit would be dead. You wouldn't like that now, would you?" Lostpaw challenged.

Rockfall stopped. "Wait. You were the one who saved Seedkit?" He asked, clearly confused now.

"Yes. You can even ask Froststar or Toadleap. Or Sunflare." Lostpaw mewed.

"Oh. I thought that was a tom who rescued her ... ah, well, whatever! Seedkit was a she-cat. We don't need she-cats in the Clan anyways. Don't get why they have 'em in here." He grinned.

"I don't know. Maybe because if she-cats weren't in MapleClan you wouldn't be existing right now?" Lostpaw shrugged. 'Not like you're special to MapleClan anyways. We could easily do without you! Heh.' She thought

"Good point," Rockfall sighed. "But that's their only use. Now stay here and be a good little kitty while I go on a hunting patrol with the other toms of the Clan. Bye." Rockfall snorted, walking off now to join the nearest hunting patrol.

Lostpaw sighed as she watched, then went over to join Pebblepaw in eating a watervole. Actually, she had only took one bite out of it even though she's had the dead creature in front of her for a good fifteen minutes. "Pebblepaw? Are you feeling okay?" Lostpaw asked quietly, staring at her.

"No. No, not really ... I mean ... why would those rogues want to attack me? It doesn't make sense ... " Pebblepaw sighed quietly. flicking her ears and resting her head on her paws.

"I don't know either, Pebblepaw. You're not the only one whose stumped about all this. Those rogues are probably out of their mind if they want to hurt you. You haven't harmed anybody." Lostpaw pointed out softly.

"I know. That's what I was thinking ... it just really, really confuses me, you know." Pebblepaw sighed.

"Anyways, I wonder how Birdfly or Birdflight or whoever that cat was had died. I think I had smelt sickness on him earlier ... " Lostpaw said grimly.

"I know. He just, like, fell over. Dead." Pebblepaw frowned just thinking about the horrific scene. She had almost died until Lostpaw proceeded to call up the alarm on those five, well, now four, MeadowClanners. If that's even who they really, truly are. They were a bit unruly, even for MeadowClan. Just attacking

MapleClan for little to no reason at all ... if they had a reason, Lostpaw would like to find out.

Chapter Seventeen

Three sunrises later, and it was the day of the Gathering. That night, Froststar called out a meeting so he could pick who he may bring to the Gathering. "All cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the Highrock for a Clan meeting!" His deep voice rang out as cats gathered all around.

"As you all know," the huge leader began as the cats settled themselves below him. "Today is the day of the Gathering. The day as to which all four Clans - MapleClan, CloudClan, MeadowClan, and WolfClan - gather together in peace underneath the Lone Tree." The name sounded exactly like what it was. It was the only tree to be found right out in the middle of the forest. It was huge, big enough for the four leaders of all four Clans to climb onto it and the deputies of all four Clans to settle themselves down below, near the stump. The area around it was vast - large enough to fit cats of all four Clans.

"Tonight, I will pick out the warriors and apprentices that will be coming to the Gathering with me, as always. The cats who I would like to pick out are Stormfast, our great and loyal deputy. Next I would like to choose Cricketleg, Rabbitleg, Swiftdawn, Bluemask, Smokesnarl, Venomstrike, Mistcloud, Crowfall, Stoneflight, Tanglepaw, Waterpaw, Mudpaw, Thornscratch, Foxheart, and, last but definitely not least, Lostpaw." Froststar announced.

The whole Clan gasped at his decision, including Lostpaw. Froststar had never brought she-cats to Gatherings, not once in his life! "Why bring a she-cat to a Gathering? Even if Lostpaw helped rescue someone, she still broke a rule by doing so!" Ravencall was the one who called this comment out. It wasn't a surprise, really, in Lostpaw's eyes. He was clearly jealous of all of that attention she was getting.

"Yeah!" Smokesnarl agreed. "Why bring her to a Gathering! She won't have anything important to say!" He growled.

"Neither will you," Froststar stated, glaring hard at Smokesnarl. "I haven't seen you rescuing anyone." He retorted. That shut Smokesnarl up. He was possibly the most arrogant in the Clan.

Some toms stayed quiet about it, but most didn't. They disagreed with Froststar's choice. "Honestly, I can't believe my mate got picked to go to the Gathering instead of
me! It's a shame!" Rockfall growled out. Lostpaw glared at him, quite obviously disagreeing with his words.

"Or my sister!" Pinepaw stated. "Why would my sister get picked instead of me?!" He hollered.*'Okay, that hurt ... '* Lostpaw thought, shooting her brother a sharp look. Froststar glared at all of the toms whom had protested.

"Quiet!" He growled, which shut them up. "It is my choice for Lostpaw to come to the Gathering and**that is final!** None of you will change my mind. She's coming whether you like it or not!" Froststar said. "Meeting dismissed." He then said, which left the warriors to murmur quietly to themselves.

Lostpaw went over to Pinepaw. "Why'd you say that?" She asked. "That was mean." She pointed out. "I'm your sister. Have you forgotten about that? Remember how you said that your gender doesn't matter many moons ago?" She added.

"I said that because everyone thinks you're so much more special than me! All of the attention is pointed directly at you. Sure, you spoke up against a warrior about breaking the Warrior Code. Sure, you rescued a kit from death. That doesn't make you any better than anyone else!" Pinepaw exploded.

"I ... I never said it did, Pinepaw." Lostpaw soothed her brother quietly. "I'm not trying to be better than you. Obviously, you're better than me at some things which includes hunting and fighting, since I've never been trained to do that kind of thing like you have. I just do the right thing." She purred.

"Oh what?! What are you saying now? That you're doing the right thing and I'm doing the wrong thing? Look, Lostpaw, I've been looking forward to going to a Gathering my whole life! And then

you, a she-cat, get picked instead of me!" Pinepaw hissed, his fur bristling.

"Who are you to say that I haven't ever wanted to go to a Gathering, also? Sorry to say this, Pinepaw, but you're acting selfish right now." Lostpaw said, flexing her claws which were actually quite sharp.

Pinepaw stopped for a minute, thinking. "I have not been selfish, Lostpaw. You have." He was just coming up with excuses now so that he didn't look like a fool in front of a she-cat, Lostpaw could tell. "**You are not my sister, and you never will be.**" He stated, then turned, walking away.

Lostpaw stood there, watching her brother, as helpless as could be. *'This popularity thing has ruined my life. First Bloodpaw, now Pinepaw ...* 'Lostpaw stopped thinking about it and finally, she just sighed, shaking her head as she looked around. The Clan was already beginning to leave. The ones that were going to the Gathering like her, that is, at least.

Lostpaw glanced back at everyone in the Clan, then started following behind Frostar and all of the other cats towards their destination: The Lone Tree, of course. Her tail being dragged behind her, she looked over her shoulder to see that Rockfall was staring at her, a mad look on his face that he didn't get picked to go to the Gathering and a **she-cat who was his own mate did!** She really didn't think that half of the toms going to the Gathering actually deserved to go, but she'd never dare to say her thoughts out loud, especially with Rockfall not that far away.

The whole way there, everyone except Toadleap, Thornscratch, Foxheart, and Frostar were staring at her as if she was a disease. It didn't really bug her. It happened a lot now, actually, though it did get on her nerves, however. As if she would ever dare to complain, though. Not before long, Frostar and the rest of MapleClan had arrived at the Lone Tree, where the Gathering would soon be held. Turns out, WolfClan and CloudClan were already there, though MeadowClan wasn't ... not as if she was surprised, however, and she doubted that anyone else in MapleClan would've been as well . The cats of MeadowClan were probably ... busy.

Froststar padded over to the Lone Tree and jumped up onto one of the branches to talk with the other leaders of the Clans, which were, as followed; Icestar of WolfClan, and Duststar of CloudClan. Though the leader of MeadowClan was known as Redstar. She was a she-cat, too, which could possibly have been a reason as to why she had made MeadowClan cats attack MapleClan. If she had even set that plot up, anyways.

Cats all around Lostpaw began to sit and lay down, talking to eachother, sharing tongues, even though they were all from other Clans ... it really unnerved her. How could they just trust eachother so easily? She could hears cats like Toadleap talking rather good, actually, about Lostpaw, to the other medicine cats of the Clan, though there was also cats like Smokesnarl talking bad about her to the other Clans. Lostpaw didn't mind being talked goodly about, like how Toadleap was currently talking about her, though if someone dared to talk bad about her, well, that was a bit too far ... again, not as if she would ever dare to complain about it to anyone, not even to Froststar or even Toadleap.

Lostpaw sighed when all of a sudden, the cats of MeadowClan barged in with Redstar in the lead, her tail held high as she glared at the others. Literally, glared. If looks could kill, then everyone would have dropped to the floor. Yes, she had definitely created the idea of attacking MapleClan, without a doubt ... she jumped onto the tallest branch and, without missing a beat in her ice cold voice, yowled out loud enough for everyone around the large tree to hear ...

"LET THE GATHERING BEGIN!"

Chapter Eighteen

"I will start." Redstar meowed, and, before she could deal with any words of protest from the other Clan leaders, she began. "MeadowClan has been doing well for the past five moons. However, as expected, five of my warriors decided to go out on an unplanned trip to MapleClan." She glanced at Froststar. "As far I can tell, they attacked the Clan without my permission. One had died during the trip, I could tell, and he shall remain unnamed. Though they still managed to come back with five. How is that so?" She smirked, before beginning again.

"Well, quite awhile ago, Breezeflame, one of our warriors, had managed to become exiled. Apparently, she had decided to join MapleClan. Well, she left with the other four MeadowClanners from MapleClan territory, and then went back to camp, expecting us to not be aware of the blood on their paws and fangs. We are not fools. Of course we figured this out, and, so of course, they were punished with exile." Redstar smiled slightly.

"That is all I have to say. Duststar, you may start."

"Well, all has been well for CloudClan this past couple of moons. Prey is plentiful, and we have had peace for quite awhile. The river is running finely, so of course we get lots of fish, keeping our bellies full about every minute of the day!" He purred. Well, at least CloudClan has been doing fine this past couple of moons. "Icestar." He turned to the other leader, and let he start.

"As far as I am concerned, WolfClan has been having quite a bit of trouble ourselves. Reasons as to this are, recently, two of our warriors were killed - Bluebaze and Firefur - brutally. They had**large gashes in their sides,** as if caused by another cat. We are unaware of what may have done this to our brave fellow warriors, though we are looking forward to finding out." She finished. "Froststar, your turn."

Froststar started speaking before she had even finished. "Ten moons

ago, a she-kit was born. Her name was Lostkit. Well, today, she is known as Lostpaw. Recently, she, as a she-cat (with them knowing how MapleClan treats their she-cats) has spoken up against a warrior, whom is not here today, about him having broken the Warrior Code. Then, she managed to save a poor, innocent kit - Seedkit - from a death faced similar to Blueblaze's and Firefur's. However, as Redstar said, five of her warriors invaded out camp recently. Woodlash, Sunflare's mate and father of Seedkit, was wounded in the same way. With a **large gash in his side.** He, however, has not died, and we are hoping for him not to have to die, either. Breezepaw, or, Breezeflame, had joined a few sunrises before that, claiming herself to be a kittypet and showing so much humbility that it was creepy."

'I knew that they all thought it was creepy!' Lostpaw thought.

"As I was saying, when I ordered Breezeflame to attack the rogues, she obliged, and left, leaving the other four *rogues* trailing behind her. That had, actually, happened only three sunrises ago. So of course, we are wrecked with grief over the incident, especially Firehawk, Breezeflame's apparent *mate,* as she called him." Froststar finished. "That is all. The Gathering is now over." He said, and so the cats began to find their Clan leaders again, Lostpaw following directly behind Froststar, Stormfast, and Toadleap, of course, somehow managing to have squeezed into the front of the group of cats.

They began to make their way back towards camp now. Slowly and quietly. Soon enough, they were back at camp and going inside of the entrance. Lostpaw was secretly hoping that Pinepaw wouldn't still be mad at her, so she approached him. "Hi, Pinepaw." She mewed. "I hope you're not still mad at me. I mean, it's not my fault that Froststar picked me to go to the Gathering. I just did a lot of good things, you know, that you could do, too, if you tried real hard."

Pinepaw looked up from the ground, glaring at Lostpaw. "It comes so easy for you! You're always capable of doing the right thing. Of being praised. Well, I can't .... " he trailed off.

"You're the one with the easy life, Pinepaw. You know that, right?"

Lostpaw questioned. "You get praised for nothing besides being born a tomcat, unlike me, who was somehow born a she-cat!" I exclaimed. "Now stop being sorry for yourself. You've managed to become born a tom and catch prey on your first hunting trip, something which I'm sure most apprentices can't manage to do." I pointed out. "**You have nothing to be mad about.**You are treated fairly just for being born ... I have to work my way up into being treated fairly! By doing the right things." She growled.

Pinepaw growled. "You're so wrong," he snapped, as if he knew something that Lostpaw didn't ... maybe he really did know something she didn't. As a matter of fact, there's been rumors going around that most of the time, the toms of MapleClan kept secrets from she-cats, even from their siblings or their mates ... actually, that wasn't surprising to Lostpaw. *Nothing about what any of the toms did to she-cats was exactly surprising to Lostpaw and, she was sure, possibly many other apprentices.* Though nevermind that. "You are not my sister," he repeated from earlier, then turned, stalking off.

"Goodbye." Lostpaw whispered quietly, her ears flattening. What had she done?! Nothing. She had done absolutely nothing except get picked for the Gathering simply because she had managed to do some of the right things! She would like to hear a **good excuse** as to why Pinepaw had been treating her like this recently. In all earnesty, she was starting to get sick of it, really. She hadn't done anything ... what was there to get all worked up about?

Sighing, Lostpaw slowly walked over to the she-cat apprentice's den, her ears flattening while her tail dragged out behind her.

Chapter Nineteen

Moons later from Lostpaw's incident with Pinepaw, she was given the name "Losthope" after she had given birth to Rockfall's first litter of kits. In the litter, there were four kits - two she-cats, two toms. Rockfall named the toms, of course, and Losthope named the she-cats. Of course, she had named one of the she-cats Sunkit, in honor of her sister that passed away so long ago, and the other Lifekit. Now, Rockfall, of course, had named the strongest of the litter (a tom, of course *sigh*) Clawkit, and the other one Skykit, whom was the runt of the litter and had the potential to become a medicine cat due to his size. Perhaps he could become Toadleap's second apprentice - the first one, Dogpaw, passed away before Losthope was born.

Foxkit, Bearkit, Badgerkit, and Wolfkit had all been given their suffix "paw" and their mentors not too long ago. Foxpaw's mentor was Bluemask, whom was decent, Losthope supposed. Bearkit, Ravencall - which was bad, obviously. Badgerkit was given Birdflight, decent as well, and Wolfpaw Smokesnarl. Losthope knew she needn't complain about this - it was all of their problems. Besides, she had never been real close to that litter of kits anyways. Basically her stepbrothers, though eh. It wasn't as if they would like her in any way at all.

Milkdrop, one of the cats apart of Rockfall's posse, had found a mate, Berrypaw. And so had Fernshade, another cat apart of Rockfall's posse who was his "*second-in-command,"* meaning Milkdrop was just the *"Omega"* the whole time as well. Not like it wasn't obvious. His mate was Vinepaw, a pretty tabby she-cat with rare, emerald green eyes and a loving personality. Berrypaw was white with silver patches and blue eyes, also cute.

Pebblepaw had found a mate as well, and was quite close to giving birth to a new litter of kits, but not ready yet, so she still maintains her apprentice name and her suffix "paw." Her mate was Mistcloud, a handsome ginger tabby with green eyes. He wasn't abusive, and

he didn't shove the fact that he was a tom down Pebblepaw's throat or ... anywhere else, for that matter.

One day, Losthope's kits were sleeping next to her (at the age of 4 moons), so she decided that she may go to sleep for perhaps just a few hours. Just to get some rest. Kits were not the easiest things to handle, especially when they're close to becoming apprentices. However, the next minute she awoke, they were gone. Every. Single. One. Of. Them. She could faintly think back and remember Thornscratch and Foxheart telling her and Pebblepaw the story of *"Icethorn and the Missing Kits."* About how Icethorn would take all of those kits, stealing them from their mothers at nighttime, and brutally kill them, one day even her own, until she was caught.

Then she remembered Seedkit, and suddenly became afraid that perhaps the same cat whom had injured her may have hurt one of her own kits, or worse, all of them, in a similar fashion. She stood up and ran out of the den, out of the camp, in hopes of looking for them. She knew that cats had saw her, the toms, most likely, and would probably report her to Froststar, though she didn't care. All she cared about now were her four missing kits ... *all four of them were missing!* How could she have been so stupid? At least, she knew, that if they were kitnapped by a stranger, they wouldn't die or get injured easily. They were fighters, no doubt about that.

Losthope began calling their names. "Clawkit! Sunkit! Lifekit! Skykit! Where are you?!" She asked, repeating other phrases similar to that one over and over again, hoping for some sort of response, some sort of answer, a mewl, a cry for help ... just anything! She could deal with anything at this moment, just as long as she could have all of her kits back ... or at least one, if anything. And to her, whichever kit she got wouldn't matter. She-kit or tom. Strong or weak. Tall or tiny. Fat or skinny ...

She kept looking, searching and searching. What had felt like long hours were actually just short minutes in the contrary. Finally, she sighed, giving up, and slumping against a thick tree in the woods. Then, she realized that giving up wouldn't help her with anything. It wouldn't help her find her kits, dead or alive! Losthope would not give up hope!

"Skykit? Sunkit? Was that you? Clawkit, perhaps? Lifekit?!" She kept repeating that over and over, hoping for another answer until she stumbled over something small and fell in dark, sticky crimson. She looked down at herself as she pulled herself to her paws, studying the crimson. What? Berries? No. How could she have tripped over a berry bush? She wasn't that clumsy.

Then she noticed something else. A dark clump of fur that looked disturbingly familiar, covered in that crimson ... no, that crimson wasn't berries, she soon realized. That crimson was ***blood!*** With horror, she stared at the clump of fur that just idly lay there, and slowly rolled the small kit over onto her back. Lifekit ....

She was covered in blood. Nobody could have dealt with that much bloodloss and *lived,* especially a tiny little kit like Lifekit! Losthope began searching for a breath of life, anyways, and then, she soon realized, Lifekit didn't have any ...

Chapter Twenty (FINAL)

Losthope looked at the broken clump of lifeless white and brown fur, all bloodied and scarred. She sat there, continuing to stare at the body before sighing and pulling herself to her paws. She continued searching for her other kits that she hoped were still alive, out there, somewhere. Clawkit, Skykit, and Sunkit. She continued walking until her paws ached and she felt as if she wouldn't be able to walk any farther without them falling off her very legs right at that moment.

Shaking her head, she kept walking. She was almost sure that she was most likely on another Clan's territory right now, she was so desperate to find her three little kits. Soon enough, she found herself walking in circles trying to find them. She could've sworn that she saw the same tree five or six times, but she didn't care. Sniffing, she thought about Lifekit and her lifeless clump of fur, her little, tiny body, that had been just laying there, decomposing, blood all around her ... shaking the image out of her head, she kept on.

Losthope looked all around her until she found a strand of light gray fur, like the fur of Clawkit's pelt, and sniffed it before picking up the scent and figuring out where Clawkit was at ... or his body, she realized, as soon as she saw it not too far away. Walking over, she sat and looked down at the now-straggly body that simply lay there, bleeding. The kit wasn't dead yet, she could tell, as it was mewling desperately.

Losthope picked Clawkit up from his position on the ground and then walked over to a pond. Taking a deep breath, she noted how her strongest cat in the litter had stopped breathing, so his heart had stopped beating. Dropping his body inside of the pond, she knew it was cruel, though now, nobody could eat him, like a fox or something like that. Unless minnows nibbled on body parts, she figured that Clawkit would be safe until he decomposed into the ground.

Then, she kept looking. Shortly after, she found Sunkit, who was, yes, dead. At the age of two moons, she had died. Perhaps Sunkit simply had not been meant to be ... she was probably never even supposed to be born, which was exactly the reason why the kit she had named Sunkit had died as well. *'Why am I thinking these terrible thoughts? Of course Sunkit was meant to live! StarClan can't control life and death, they can only warn us ... '* She repeated to herself over and over in her head. Yes, this was her way of saying 'no, StarClan is not horrible. No ... '

Skykit better be alive, she couldn't help but to think. If three of her kits had to die, she hoped that at least one would survive through it all. And so, she soon realized, her wish had came true. Skykit was alive, untouched, and mewling out there, under a tree. What a surprise that the weakest kit out of the litter, Skykit, had somehow managed to survive, when none of his stronger siblings like Clawkit or Sunkit had managed to do so!

Though she didn't dare to complain. Losthope picked the kit up in her jaws and then padded back to camp. Tears were in her eyes by the time she reached it. For some reason, the waterworks hadn't manage to spill out of the dam before she got to camp. She supposed she had been holding them in subconsciously, without even knowing that she was on the urge of crying and was only just holding them in.

She dropped the kit at the foot of camp. Everyone was alarmed as they saw her with that kit placed firmly on the ground in front of her. Rockfall raced over. "What happened?! Where's Clawkit?" He demanded. He didn't bother to mention the she-cats of the litter, Sunkit and Lifekit, just Clawkit. Losthope shook her head sadly as she thought about it.

"Dead. So are Sunkit and Lifekit."

"How did they die?"

"No possible idea."

"Well, at least drop Skykit off at the medicine cat's den so that Toadleap may take a look at him!" Rockfall growled. Losthope

nodded and picked the tomkit up in her jaws before running over to the medicine cat's den, dropping him at the entrance, then walking back over to Rockfall.

However, all of a sudden, Froststar called a meeting. "All cats old enough to catch their own prey gather beneath the Highrock for a Clan meeting!" He called, and everyone gathered around quickly, fur bristling and all. "As you all can see, three of Losthope's litter - Sunkit, Lifekit, and Clawkit - have passed away, from what I've heard, similar wounds to those that were marked on Woodlash and Seedkit, all related to Sunflare. We will mourn later, even without their bodies visible." Froststar said. "Though I bring good news as well. Since Stormfast has retired from his position as deputy, I would like to pick a new deputy for MapleClan." His voice rose so that the cats could hear him better.

"I say these words before StarClan, so that the spirits of our warrior ancestors may hear and approve of my choice. The new deputy of MapleClan will be Losthope." The whole Clan was silent. Even the she-cats. Eventually, however there was cheering.

Some of the cats were proud. Take Cherryflower, for example, or Pebblepaw. Then, some were angry - like Ravencall, Whiteclaw, and Smokesnarl. Surprised - Rockfall, Fernshade, and Milkdrop, most definitely.

"**Meeting dismissed.**"